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ABSTRACT

A two-part study involving qualitative research in the form of focus groups and a quantitative telephone survey examined the extent of drug and alcohol use by school-age children and the behaviors and attitudes surrounding it. Results indicate that Wisconsin parents are comfortable with alcohol use, considering it a part of their culture, although almost 80% consider underage drinking a community problem. At the same time, nearly 75% have allowed or will allow their children to taste alcohol before age 21, and over 70% said that alcohol concessions at community fairs and sporting events are sometimes acceptable. The message taught in schools should be that moderation and responsible use are more important than a magic legal drinking age. Most parents agreed there is no responsible way to use drugs or cigarettes. Illicit drug use is far less tolerable than drinking, and drinking and driving would also merit severe punishment. Contradictory messages are communicated when schools and parents fail to provide a united front. Full report includes a 6 page summary pamphlet. (MSF)

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# A Tradition of Tolerance: What Wisconsin Parents Think About Teen Alcohol Use

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction/Herbert J. Grover, State Superintendent

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# A Tradition of Tolerance: What Wisconsin Parents Think About Teen Alcohol Use

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## Introduction

Chamberlain Research Consultants, a Wisconsin-based marketing research firm, was commissioned by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to conduct a study that would first confirm, and eventually determine the extent of, the behaviors and attitudes exhibited by Wisconsin parents towards drug and alcohol use by juveniles. The research was conducted in two phases; a qualitative phase and a quantitative phase.

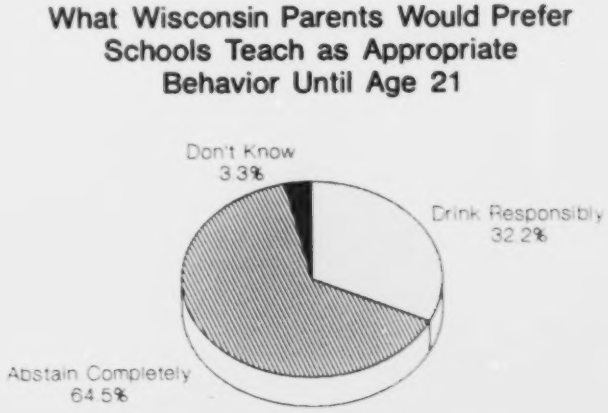
The qualitative phase of this research took place during October and November of 1992, and included four focus groups. The groups were each composed of approximately 12 parents with children under the age of 26, and met in locations throughout the state that exemplify Wisconsin's socioeconomic diversity: Madison, Stevens Point, Kenosha and Neenah. The discussions were used to illuminate the inconsistencies between what parents will voice as correct and appropriate behavior versus what their actions condone.

These results were then used to construct the survey instrument used in the quantitative phase of the research. The survey was conducted by telephone during December 1992. Its goal was to determine the extent to which the parental inconsistencies revealed in the focus groups held true for the entire state.

## Study Summary

Wisconsin parents are comfortable with alcohol. They are familiar with its effects and believe they use it responsibly. They view alcohol as part of their culture, and regard it as an expected and tolerable part of coming of age in this state. Most have sympathy for the embarrassment associated with alcoholism, but exhibit condemnation for repeat drunk drivers and drug addicts.

Wisconsin parents seem to be torn between the safety of their children and the illegality of alcohol consumption before the age of 21. When asked point blank, the majority of parents will parrot the institutionally correct responses: the drinking age should remain 21 and public schools should advocate abstention from alcohol until this age. However, when further probed, most of these parents were resigned to the fact that there is a phase children go through where they are going to experiment with alcohol no matter what parents and schools do, and thus would rather have their children doing so safely (at home with supervision, not driving afterwards, and not overdoing.) The consequences of drunk driving have finally gotten through to this generation of parents who fondly remember drinking a six pack out behind the airport in the back seat of Dad's Chevy. They've read about one too many alcohol-related traffic fatalities and don't want the next one to be their teenager.


What Wisconsin Parents Would Prefer Schools Teach as Appropriate Behavior Until Age 21
Don't Know 3.3%
Drink Responsibly 32.2%
Abstain Completely 64.5%

Other drugs were not viewed in this same vein. Most agreed with the description of drugs as totally taboo. Just under 90 percent of the parents surveyed revealed that they would severely punish their children if they caught them smoking crack or using acid, as opposed to the 22 percent who would severely punish their 17- or 18-year-old for drinking. (It is interesting to note that rates of illicit drug use have continued to decline in conjunction with this opinion.)

Study participants further corroborated their intolerance for driving after drinking by aligning its punishment with that of using other drugs. Eighty-two percent indicated that driving after drinking would also warrant a severe punishment.

The hypocrisy surrounding underage alcohol consumption was clearly evidenced by the parents in this study. Almost 80 percent described underage drinking as at least a somewhat serious problem in their community. (More people described underage drinking as a problem than described crime, unemployment, illegal drug use, gangs, or alcohol abuse as a problem.) Yet, nearly 75 percent of these parents have allowed or will allow their children to have their first sip of alcohol before the age of 21, and well over half before the age of 18. Most respondents did acknowledge that parents who drink are more likely to have children who drink, but apparently did not view this as a problem, since the majority saw no harm in adults drinking in moderation in front of their children.

The focus group participants were quick to fault TV for glamorizing alcohol by associating it with "fun activities"; however, the majority of those surveyed did not mind alcohol's real life association with several of these "fun activities," even though children are frequently present. Over 70 percent of the parents surveyed described beer tents at community fairs and festivals, and serving alcohol at professional sporting events and community block parties as at least sometimes acceptable.

Ironically, over 80 percent of the respondents agreed that their communities provide strong support for children to remain drug and alcohol free. This directly contradicted what parents in each of the four focus groups said.

Ninety-five percent of the parents surveyed agreed that children drink because their friends do. The same percent agreed that peer pressure was the number one problem facing children today.

# Qualitative Results
# Alcohol and Drug Use Focus Groups

## Introduction

A series of four focus groups was conducted with parents of past, present and future public school children to discover their perceptions of alcohol and drug use by children.

Groups were conducted with parents from the Fox Valley, Racine-Kenosha, Madison, and Stevens Point areas between October 27 and November 11, 1992. Each was moderated by Sharon Chamberlain of Chamberlain Research Consultants in Madison, Wisconsin. Recruits received $25 or $35, depending upon the city, as an incentive for participation.

Participants were recruited by telephone and restricted to those with at least one child under the age of 26 who has attended, or will attend, a public school.

## Capsule Analysis

Participants believed the majority of alcohol and drug use was due to a lack of things for children to do in their communities. All thought the best way to deter school age children from drinking was to develop community activities. All liked the idea of adding some type of volunteer program, or community service activities, to the public high school curriculum. Few were well versed in the alcohol and drug prevention programs currently in public schools.

Drinking was viewed as part of Wisconsin's culture, and therefore the majority felt that "responsible use" should be taught, as opposed to the unrealistic "no use" message. Parents said they practiced responsible use in front of their children and seemed to tolerate some social drinking among high schoolers. Adults were drinking at home or using designated drivers, and then reinforcing this behavior with their children.

## Summary Points

1. Parents in all four groups were quick to describe peer pressure as the number one problem facing youth today. All four groups detailed the need to instill strong family values in children so that they will make the right decision when faced with choices presented by their peers.

2. Almost every participant said they would prefer the message taught in schools should be the responsible use of alcohol. They said the message "Don't drink, it's not healthy, just doesn't fly." As for drugs and cigarettes, most said they did not believe that there is a responsible way to use either.

3. The cigarette message had gotten through to many young children who then have urged the adults they know to quit smoking. Many thought teenage girls were smoking more now than previously. They agreed that girls were more assertive in general.

4. Whatever the message, most of these parents agreed that drug and alcohol education needs to be incorporated into a child's life at an early age. They asserted that message senders have to *sell* children on the ideas of not smoking, not drinking, and not doing drugs.

5. People did not see drug prevention as interwoven into school curriculum.
Some of the Kenosha participants thought testimonials might be an effective way to deglamorize drug and alcohol use.

6. All four groups liked the idea of adding some type of volunteer program to the current curriculum.

7. Most seemed resolved to the fact that children are going to experiment with alcohol no matter what parents and schools do, and therefore they would rather have children drinking at home where they can supervise them.

8. They listed the following as reasons children might drink or do drugs: result of boredom, low self-esteem, nothing to look forward to in the future, because we tell them not to, and as a rite of passage.

9. All groups, with the exception of Kenosha, acknowledged that role modeling affects the behavior of children.

10. Television shows and cigarette/liquor advertisers were mentioned as bad influences on children. MTV and Camel cigarettes were singled out as the most notorious for glamorizing inappropriate behaviors for children.

11. They often made excuses for not drinking -- even for their children: "He's no party pooper but he doesn't do it." "Don't get me wrong, when I was young I could party with the best of them."

12. Drinking was described as part of Wisconsin's culture. They listed bowling, sports activities, and stress as typically associated with drinking. There was an air of fierce pride in being able to hold your liquor.

13. Participants thought more people were drinking at home, but they did not describe overall consumption as having decreased. They thought this was probably due to the highly publicized consequences of drinking and driving.

14. Alcohol producers sponsoring events and beer tents at church and civic functions were justified for financial reasons. Several participants said that they did dislike the use of alcohol at some of these events (church picnics), but resolved that because of the economics this would never change.

15. "Drugs are illegal" was often used as the excuse for the taboos associated with drugs. This same negative connotation was not connected to underage drinking, even though it too is illegal. All said drugs lead to crime.

## Detailed Findings

## Alcohol and Drug Use Focus Groups
## Group #1: Fox Valley
27 October 1992

### Participants

Twelve parents from the Fox Valley area participated in this focus group. All but two were women. Only one of the participants had an annual household income under $25,000; she was also the only single parent in the group.

Karen, Green Bay, claims adjuster, mother of a 9 month old

Pam, Neenah, floral designer, mother of four: 16, 12, 9, 5

John, Oshkosh, works for Banner Packaging, father of an 18 month old

Deb, Appleton, secretary, mother of three: 10, 7, 5

Carol, Neenah, mother of four: 22, 20, 17, 14

Cheryl, Appleton, claims processor, mother of three: 23, 19, 17

Wayne, Little Chute, manufacturing engineer, father of two: 20, 18

Cindy, Kaukauna, unemployed, single mother of three: 15, 11, 9

Peggy, Menasha, just graduated from college,
mother of ten: 22, 21, 19, 17, 15, 14, 12, 10, 7, 4

Lynn, Kimberly, works part-time as a cleaning lady, mother of two: 17, 12

Mary R., Appleton, housewife, mother of three: 16, 16, 13

Mary B., Little Chute, works at Hardees, mother of two: 8, 6

### Adult Behavior

*Smoking*

Smoking was the first topic addressed. Only one of the participants admitted to being a smoker. Most felt people were smoking less and all could think of someone who had quit. One participant felt that smoking is less visible now because it is prohibited in so many public buildings and offices now. He contended that you still see just as many people lighting up as they get in their car. Another observed that more women were smoking now because more of them are in the work place.

*Drinking*

Participants thought that more people were drinking at home these days because of stiffer drunk driving

penalties. A few told tales of people they knew who were cutting back their alcohol consumption when it was associated with a weeknight activity or if they had been in an accident where drugs or alcohol played a role.

Recreational baseball leagues are perceived as still very strongly tied to alcohol. Teams play for alcohol as the prize, the teams are sponsored by bars, and the players go out and drink together after the game. Bowling was another sports activity group members associated with alcohol consumption, as were going over to one of the guys' house for the football game and tailgating. Church picnics were named as another place adults drink. Participants saw this as a source of income for the church and thus it was justified. Bingo halls and Indian casinos were also mentioned.

Participants agreed that happy hour is still a popular and profitable offering in Wisconsin. One woman explained how her husband, who works in a mill, is habitually invited out to the bars on payday. Another woman confessed that her husband's boss buys beer for his crew on Friday afternoons and they drink it right at the shop. Almost everyone admitted having a drink to relieve stress.

Most had observed people who had brought their children to a bar. Participants found this to be unacceptable behavior . . . unless it was a "family bar." Bars that were up North, served food, or located in bowling alleys were generally seen as OK. They agreed that your reason for going to the bar should dictate whether or not you bring the children. "If you're going there to get drunk leave the kids at home, but if you're going there for a burger and a beer that's OK." Time of day was also listed as a factor because the bar's atmosphere and clientele may change as night falls.

Generation after generation growing up "belly to the bar" alongside a parent was viewed as intolerable by this group. They realized the ramifications of setting an irresponsible example for their children. Their idea of a responsible role model was one who drank moderately when the child was present. No use in front of children was not viewed as necessary or practical.

When the familiar scenario of a child running to the refrigerator to get a beer for Mommy or Daddy was brought up, the group seemed to be divided by gender. Males found this behavior more acceptable than women. One woman even complained about her husband doing "that" all the time.

One young respondent said that she drank more before she turned 18 than she does now. She said she didn't feel the pressure to have a beer that she used to feel. The group agreed that as you get older you don't have "that peer pressure" that you do when you are young.

## Child Behavior

### *Smoking*

Most believed that "young children," junior high age, had not gotten the message that smoking was harmful to your health. Many described instances where they had observed children smoking in front of schools, in parks, or in cars.

Participants described "real young children," elementary school age, as the ones they saw putting pressure on adults to quit smoking. "You're killing me too," "It smells," "It's socially unacceptable," "Makes my clothes stink," were some of the phrases group members had heard children say to smokers they knew.

A few participants voiced some concern over cigarette companies targeting ads toward children. One woman exclaimed, "More kids know who Joe Camel is than Mickey Mouse."

Many also expressed concern over the popularity of tobacco chewing.

*Drinking*

The majority believed that girls were drinking more than boys, yet they could not attribute this difference to anything specific. Most thought that girls were just tougher now than they used to be. They described girls as doing things even the boys didn't do "back when," and being more aggressive in general.

Participants believe that their children do not drive after drinking. One mother went as far as to say, "It's almost worth providing her with wheels for, 'cause the one thing I know is that she doesn't drink and drive."

These parents believe that drinking is associated with peer groups -- either the whole group drinks or the whole group doesn't. "It's like a group thing. If you want to be in a certain group then you gotta drink whether you like it or not." Another mother said her boys and their friends did not drink because their group was into other things, like bowling and building rockets. "Everybody knows who drinks and what groups they belong to." One mother said her daughter felt like a reject because she didn't drink.

The unemployed woman asserted that children might be drinking because there's not much for them to look forward to in the next ten years. She compared this to the increase in alcoholism seen during the Depression. The entire group agreed that drinking increases when economic times are tough. One cited the inner city as a perfect example of an impoverished area that has a high incidence of alcohol and drug related problems.

Participants agreed that Wisconsin's culture promoted drinking. One suggested that alcohol was so glamorized that people overlooked the harmful side effects and health risks. Others volunteered similar comments and stories. One woman postulated, "I think people in this area are so anti-drug that they overlook the drinking, and they think that's OK." Several agreed. Many thought that people in this area associate a certain amount of pride with their "bought and paid for [beer] belly."

Looking at just Wisconsin, all thought that there were more cases of alcoholism than drug addiction; however, nationwide most felt drug addictions equalled or topped cases of alcoholism. Most associated drug use with urban areas and inner cities, though they admitted that there was probably more drug use going on in the Fox Valley than they were aware of or willing to admit.

Several thought drug addiction ultimately costs society more money. The high cost of sustaining the lives of those who have permanently damaged themselves was mentioned as one reason they felt this way.

Half thought that drug addicts were also likely to be alcoholics. Most thought the converse was not as prevalent, except possibly where prescription drugs were involved. They insinuated that being addicted to one thing increased your potential for becoming addicted to another.

*Drugs*

Drugs were a fear and a concern for all group members. Lack of familiarity with the effects of drug use accounted for some of their concern. One woman explained, "To me the drinking is a known. I've been there. I know, but the drug use is what scares me."

The criminal element that is typically associated with drugs was what worried participants the most. Several comments were made throughout the group depicting the large price tags associated with most drugs and relating this to the crime factor. "Either they steal or they deal," was the general consensus.

They described drugs and gangs as going hand in hand. Later in the discussion it became evident that participants felt gangs were migrating to the Fox Valley from "the inner city" and bringing drugs with them. One described the gangs as "franchising."

Participants thought the effects of drugs were more harmful than those of alcohol. One described the effects of addiction leading to lying and theft. Many agreed that the potential of drugs to kill, "because you don't know what's in there," was much higher than the chance of drinking enough to kill yourself.

Several named crack as a popular drug right now. Another mother mentioned children doing acid at the local haunted house.

One man, disgruntled with the inability of the current system to control the drug problem, detailed, "They're going after your children in junior high school nowadays. Providing them, here have some crack. The first one's on me. That's what they're doing." Another replied to this scenario, "In my opinion they [dealers] should be taken out behind the barn and shot." Most adamantly agreed that drug dealers should receive the stiffest of penalties, "and not [be] kept in our jails forever on our money." Several qualified this, explaining, the courts should keep in perspective what the worst crimes are, and not let murders go to jail when a small time dealer or a first-time user. Some said that there were too many legal loopholes for drug dealers, and children are typically used as dealing pawns.

Half the group knew someone who had been hooked on an illegal drug.

## Solutions

### *Smoking*

The group's first reaction was to advocate teaching responsible use — because children are going to do it anyway. One suggested showing the consequences on a lung. Another responded that there is no "responsible" way to smoke. He continued that nicotine was definitely addicting and that use increases, or is at least maintained, with age instead of tapering off like alcohol use does. This was enough to sway the majority to support teaching no use.

### *Drinking*

Participants did not deem it necessary to stop using alcohol producers to sponsor events, or to stop serving alcohol at events where children are present. As long as the adult role models were drinking in moderation, the group members saw no reason to remove alcohol or its sponsorship from any activity.

Participants worried that if bars and alcohol companies did not sponsor the sports and activities, these activities would just stop for lack of another sponsor. One woman suggested that bars are patronized regularly in return for their sponsorship, whereas another type of business would not have as much to gain.

Several parents expressed discontentment with the schools' enforcement of their drug and alcohol policies when it came to good athletes. All wholeheartedly believed, and several claimed to have observed, that when the best players got caught at a beer party, you would still see them starting in the next game.

All participants agreed that the responsible use of alcohol was what should be taught to children.

Almost everyone believed that if you teach children values and moderation when they are young, it will usually outweigh peer pressure when they are older. They later admitted that there is a phase most children go through where peer influence will temporarily get the best of them, regardless of upbringing. Below are some of their comments on this topic:

> "You can't hide [alcohol]. They're gonna see it. You gotta teach children the values. If you hide it and say it's not there, they're gonna find it some how."
>
> "It sets more of a precedent if you can have these things in the house and no one's using them, as opposed to locking everything away, and never having it cross your threshold. These things are out in the world."
>
> "I think role models are more important than peer pressure. I see how my parents raised me and that's how I am, and how my husband's parents raised him . . . "

"If you're not there they're gonna do what they want, but if you put the right thoughts in their minds when they're young — my kids won't do it."

"Just being very honest and up front with them about this issue."

"I know when I used to go to a lot of parties . . . as the party went on you get a lot of pressure from a lot of people, and generally you'd see these kids give in."

"Long-term [habits] go back to the role model."

About half of these parents believed that if their children were going to experiment with alcohol they would rather the children did it at home under their supervision. The others felt that was sending a mixed message to the child. "Then that's like saying it's OK."

Some agreed that no drinking age at all might take away the forbidden fruit aspect of alcohol. "You always want what you can't have." One man cited Germany as a country where this worked, in his opinion, explaining that people are taught moderation as children.

Almost everyone thought work places should do some sort of alcohol screening. They listed several professions where it is required that employees remain alcohol-free for a certain period of time prior to starting their shifts, but they could not come up with an enforcement strategy for alcohol testing because it leaves your system in a matter of hours, unlike drugs.

### *Drugs*

All participants felt the proper role model should teach abstinence from hard drugs. Some of their comments are listed below.

"I'd never let my kid smoke marijuana in my house, or take drugs. They'd be out on the street. That would be it."

"How do you role model in drugs? Teach them how to use the needle?"

"Drugs are illegal."

"I guess to me, drugs are totally taboo."

After explaining that she did not condone cocaine and other hard drugs, one participant said, "I have a thing with marijuana that I think that revenue could be increased if they would legalize it. If you look at some of the number of people across the country that are using it, that are admitting to using it, there could be so much more revenue. But then there's also the thing that, you know, that that leads to other things." This woman went on to provide a very articulate argument for this idea. Many in the group agreed with her position that legalization and taxation was a good idea; however this may have been more indicative of her eloquent argument than of how they would vote should the idea be posed. One man alluded to Denmark, where drugs are legal, and explained that their system does work well. Several thought legalizing marijuana would cut down on the amount of other illicit drug trafficking, theorizing, "If people are going to use drugs, why not use something that's legal, as opposed to illegal." Several later advocated teaching the responsible use of marijuana, though there was heated debate.

Most felt schools had gotten the message across to young children that drugs are wrong and harmful. Several agreed with the mother who remarked, "I think the kids are real in tune, the younger ones, to the dangers of drugs." This same mother added her concern that some school programs and discussion groups made children feel like they had to come up with some problem in their own family such as an alcoholic or someone who uses illicit drugs. Many agreed.

Participants described work places as aggressively trying to prevent drug use. They liked the fact that most companies require a pre-employment drug screening. In addition, many thought it would be a good idea for business owners to screen current employees.

### *General Comments*

People described both drugs and alcohol as a means of escape, but in further descriptions drugs carried a much more negative connotation. People who use alcohol were light-heartedly described as "taking a mini-vacation," but people who use drugs do it to "cope with reality."

When asked where we need to start to solve "the problem," the first response was, "Educate the adults." Participants described adults as drinking and taking drugs for the same reasons that children do: to fit in, to feel more comfortable, to make other people more interesting, and to relieve stress. They maintained that the difference is when you're trying to educate an adult, they think they already know it all.

### *School Involvement*

When quizzed on school involvement several remarked that they lived in a "Drug Free School Zone." Some were aware that this meant penalties were stiffer for anyone caught selling drugs in these areas.

Most thought schools could only play a role that complemented what parents were teaching and modeling at home. They thought what was happening at home was most important.

One woman articulated what most found to be a viable step in the right direction for schools and communities as a whole. She began, "As much as we don't want to admit it, I think we expect too much from the school. Nobody's real eager to open their pockets and pay higher taxes, but I think that's where the beginning of the solution is. I think that kids need more positive opportunities. I think a good reason to use drugs is boredom." The group went on to explore ideas that they felt were positive opportunities for kids. Some of their ideas included: having an open gym night, a circus or carnival day, open swimming, sports activities, after-school activities, perhaps using parent volunteers so they would not have to pay a teacher to supervise after-school projects. They continued that it didn't have to be elaborate, as long as it was well supervised and it was in a safe atmosphere. One woman commented that children love attention, and the fact that there would be an adult who cares involved with these activities might be more important than the activity.

Most participants thought a community volunteer program might work if the children saw there were people that needed their help.

When asked what to do with children who are repeat offenders, several commented on a need for more of the "right type of positive attention." One remarked, "Build this child's self esteem." Another proposed a parole type system, where the student would have to see a teacher or a counselor once a week. She explained, "Just get somebody in there that cares, and really wants to know what's going on with those kids, because a lot of times their family isn't giving that to them."

The group's final comments revolved around the participants' obvious fear of gangs and increasing crime in their small community.

# ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE FOCUS GROUPS
# GROUP #2: Kenosha
28 October 1992

## Participants

Fourteen participants from the Kenosha area participated in this focus group. Half of the participants had annual household incomes less than $25,000, and five of the fourteen participants were male.

Roxanne, Racine, housewife and student, mother of three: 6, 3, 3

Kathy, Kenosha, works in sports services, mother of three: 18, 15, 9

Chuck, Kenosha, works for J.I. Case, father of one: 21

Tammy, Union Grove, works outside the home, mother of one: 11

Shirley, Kenosha, artist, mother of two: 16, 15

Marge, Kenosha, homemaker, mother of five: 42, 36, 34, 22, 21

Delfina, Kenosha, teachers' aide, mother of six: 32, 29, 28, 27, 26, 17

Cindy, Kenosha, visiting nurse, mother of two: 17, 13

Loretta, Kenosha, housewife, mother of three: 15, 12, 8

James, Racine, alcohol and drug counselor, father of a one month old

Richard, Racine, works for Chrysler, father of two: 18, 11

George, Kenosha, chef, father of two: 18, 15

Rick, Kenosha, environmental engineer, father of three: 7, 5, 2

Karene, Bristol, mother of three: 17, 14, 12

## Problems Facing Children

Participants agreed that peer pressure was the biggest problem facing children these days. Being in style, using drugs, and just being "in" were listed as instances in which children are confronted with pressure from their peers.

This group of parents was clearly very worried about the influence of the drug culture on youth in the Kenosha area. They described the problem as widespread without hesitation. Some blamed this on the lack of good job opportunities and the appeal of fast money. Others thought the moral values of children were declining in general, maybe due to lack of positive focusing by adults, or maybe because today's society has loosened the reins on youth.

Several parents commented on the young age at which they believe children are introduced to drugs, in school and on the streets. One woman, disgusted, said, "Kindergartners have Deputy Friendly coming in and showing

them different kinds of drugs." The majority, however, did not disapprove of this practice because they felt pushers were already going after children in first and second grade. "Educate them as young as possible," was the reaction of most.

Many participants felt that children did not see the long-term ramifications of drug use. One woman explained, with exasperation, that we tell children drugs are bad for them, but they see the star football player doing drugs and drinking and with no effects on his performance at all.

Participants claimed that the police downplay the extreme amount of crime and other drug related problems occurring in the Kenosha area — saying it's just media hype.

## Smoking

Eight of the 14 participants are regular smokers, and four have children who also smoke. None have children who chew tobacco.

Several of the smokers have children who put pressure on them to quit. The participants were hesitant to attribute this entirely to schools. They agreed that society as a whole was now aware of the consequences of smoking, unlike when they were children. One man commented, "These kids were born and raised on the fact that smoking is bad for your health."

## Alcohol

Most felt that people in general had not reduced their alcohol consumption, but were drinking at home more due to the stiffer drunk driving penalties. Five said they had changed their own habits for this reason. A few thought people might be drinking more in these economically stressful times.

They listed weddings, bowling alleys, holidays, bars, sporting events (local and professional), tailgating, and town and state fairs as places they typically see people drinking. No one voiced any initial disapproval for alcohol's association with these activities -- as long as people weren't driving home afterward.

All were quick to admit that children drink. A few told anecdotes about their own children. One man laughed as he told how his son confessed years later to sneaking his whiskey and then filling the bottles back up with water. Several referred to their underage children attending beer parties. One mother said that she had an agreement with her daughter to provide a safe ride home, with no questions asked, in the event that she or her friend had been drinking. This woman and one or two others indicated that their children had taken them up on this type of agreement.

A couple of the participants said they were more worried about alcohol than drugs because alcohol is so acceptable and accessible.

One woman felt that children often disregard the law because they believe that once they turn 18 their slate will be wiped clean. This led to the most impassioned portion of the discussion, revolving around the growing lack of respect for adults and authority shown by children. They felt this was fostered by an overabundance of laws protecting juveniles to a ridiculous extent. Some of their comments included the following:

> "Give the responsibility back to the parents."
>
> "The juvenile laws in this state are terrible."
>
> "When I was raised up we couldn't say nothing back . . . If they were older people you were supposed to respect them. There is no respect from youth now. Your teachers they were your second parents.

Whatever they did, they come and tell your parents, and you would be double punished . . . "

The moderator went on to address the acceptability of the drinking associated with several Wisconsin pastimes. Most did not have a problem with serving alcohol at any of the activities they had listed earlier as typically associated with alcohol, as long as people did not get out-of-control. Only one or two shook their heads in disapproval of drinking at tailgate parties. As for fairs, one woman suggested that liquor should not be served at this type of family event. Most did not agree. A few commented that they had not observed any out-of-control behavior at past fairs and therefore saw no reason to stop serving alcohol. Another proposed that beer could be served in an area separate from the family activities.

No one disapproved of alcohol being served at sporting events. A few indicated that the family sections at stadiums were a good idea. Happy hour received similar reaction. In concept, most believe it's okay to have happy hours, but described people drinking too much, getting out of control, and then driving home as a problem. No one voiced any discontentment with serving beer at church functions or using liquor as a door prize as long as the recipients were of legal drinking age.

One man thought that the employees serving the alcohol should be responsible for refusing to serve someone if they've had too much to drink. A couple indicated that this is probably a good idea.

Initially everyone ardently agreed that taking a child to a bar was bad. In the discussion that followed they qualified this to exclude bowling alleys and bars where food was served. A couple of their comments included:

> "Well it depends, if you're on your way somewhere and you stop off. Like in the middle of the day I might stop at the bowling alley where my husband works and we might all go in there, and it's fine . . . It's not like we're there 'til bar time."
>
> "I've taken mine to the bar when they were littler, but we always went to Ron's and we got something to eat."

Most did not regard hard liquor as any worse than beer. One woman thought children were more likely to drink beer because hard liquor is more of an acquired taste.

Almost everyone agreed that if their child was going to experiment with alcohol they would rather have them doing it at home.

No one was surprised by the moderator's comment that nearly all children will have tried alcohol by the time they're seniors in high school. One man added that children have to drink just to fit in with the crowd.

Most agreed that employers have become more conscious of the dangers of alcohol in the work place. A couple of the participants described the penalties enforced by their companies for drinking on the job. Another woman said that more companies were offering programs to help alcoholics without embarrassing them. All appeared to realize, and be concerned about, the potential dangers of drinking on the job — yet they seemed sympathetic to those who would lose wages because of it.

## Illicit Drugs

Just over half agreed that the illegal drug problem is worse than the alcohol problem.

The group thought that just about as many children have tried or will try marijuana as alcohol. Many were concerned about the increasing popularity of other illicit drugs, especially crack cocaine. They passionately described it as in the schools and in the community with both children and adults using it. Several guessed that at least 75 percent of the children will have tried an illicit drug, other than marijuana, by the time they are seniors in high school.

The majority felt that law enforcement for drug related crimes was inadequate. One man said, "These guys are putting guys in jail, prison and the next day these guys are walking down the streets." This man went on to describe what he determined to be the lush conditions of prison life, for example TVs and basketball courts. He concluded, "These guys are laughing at the system." Many agreed.

## The Message

### *Smoking*

Without hesitation, these parents said they wanted a "no use" message conveyed to children. One woman described smoking as a big, big problem in the schools. Others went on to comment on how easy it is for minors to buy cigarettes because clerks never ask children for an identification card.

### *Alcohol*

Nine of the fourteen participants would like to see the responsible use of alcohol taught. The majority thought the a "no use" message would not be realistic. Excerpts from their discussion follow.

> "Kids need to be more warned, okay drink responsibly but there is possibilities, there is things you need to be aware of and careful of that are consequences of drinking. They look at the shiny bottles, shiny steins that look so attractive. They don't look at what can happen. They see it, they read about it, but sometimes it's not always real to them."

> "I think they're more responsible now than they have been with the strict laws of drinking and driving and all the accidents and things that they see, and what can happen to people that they know. I think kids think twice before they drink and drive now." (Only two people agreed that children are less likely to drink and drive nowadays.)

> "I think one of the things, too, is, I mean I even have that feeling sometimes is that, 'Oh, it'll never happen to me.' I think kids have that even more so."

> "Think about what kids see in the media about alcohol — what it's portrayed to them as. How many times have you seen with cirrhosis of the liver, pictures of him lying in a bed dying of alcoholism . . . What do they see? They see kids on a beach playing volleyball. Let's have some wine coolers. They see all the pretty things of alcohol. They don't see the real death end of it. It may not happen to them but it's a possibility for them to be aware of."

### *School Involvement*

Many agreed that the high schools do not provide adequate support for children who want to remain drug and alcohol free. When asked specifically, no one could think of a single program that the high schools were using to combat the use of alcohol and other drugs. (Someone had mentioned Drug Abuse Resistance Education [DARE] earlier.) A few praised the elementary schools for keeping children busy. This group felt that the more things children had to do, the less likely they were to be getting in trouble, drinking, or using other drugs. One woman suggested that the schools start a program where the older children teach the younger children about the dangers of drugs, sex, and alcohol. Some indicated that bringing in survivors to recant their real-life horrible experiences with alcohol and other might be an effective deterrent. A few of their comments are listed below.

> "In my opinion you can't just put it on the school. I think that the parents and the schools and the teachers and everybody involved needs to sit down and work together."

> "We've got kids whose parents are in worse condition than the kids are."

"[There needs to be] more counseling, more parenting . . . counselors that actually care."

The moderator asked the group what could be done for children with less-than-model parents. The group never came to a consensus. One said that children need to be taken out of these bad environments, straightened up, and then rewarded so that it would be easier for them to resist future evils. Another countered that if you don't change where the problem started those children will just fall back into their old habits.

## Alcohol and Drug Use Focus Groups
## Group #3: Madison
4 November 1992

### Participants

The group consisted of 12 participants, five men and seven women. They were:

Nancy, medical technician, three sons ages 8, 17, 21

Scott, teacher, two children in their twenties

Katherine, cleans houses, one son age 11

Patricia, 36, accounting, three children ages 6, 8, 12

John, 43, insurance, two children ages 12 and 15

Steve, hospital supply clerk, three children ages 7, 10, 11

Cindy, farm wife, three sons ages 5,7, 9

Tom, two sons in their twenties

Cathy, insurance, two children ages 15 and 17

Lorraine, insurance, two children 19 and 22

Doreen, government project assistant, twins 1 year old

David, insurance, one son age 5

### Children's Problems

The moderator explained that the purpose of the group was to discuss drug and alcohol abuse programs for children. When asked what was the number one problem facing children today, members gave the following responses:

"Peer pressure . . . for everything they do . . . the way they comb their hair or roll up their pants."

"Coming from broken homes."

"Parents not getting involved with what their kids are doing."

Many agreed with the participant who said, "TV is a terrible influence. It makes things appear acceptable that aren't: guns, shooting, sleeping around, beer drinking . . . it becomes acceptable and looks like fun." Others added:

"MTV -- I hate that station . . . bondage, killing, rape."

"We have 11- and 12-year-old kids trying to live like Madonna."

"Kids normally like to do the opposite of what their parents tell them."

Many agreed that children will try to watch what they are told not to watch. Almost everyone agreed that TV is a bad influence and most tried to guide their children to more acceptable programming or watching less TV. One said she doesn't subscribe to cable because of the bad programming. But another said exposure to TV wasn't the problem, that what was needed was parental guidance in how to handle the exposure, how to make responsible decisions and to understand the consequences. Others agreed that children don't see the consequences and long term effects of their choices. Self esteem must be fostered if the right choices are to be made.

## Smoking

Most felt that adults smoke less today. Four in the group were smokers, two had quit, and six never smoked. Some suggested that older adults long addicted still smoke while fewer younger adults smoke. A number of participants said children smoked. They described seeing groups smoking outside schools. One reported seeing children smoking outside the middle school; it surprised her that they were starting so young. They said certain cliques smoked and one had to smoke to be in the clique.

Generally they agreed the young girls were smoking more than previously. They said tobacco companies glamorized smoking, selling long slim cigarettes and saying, "You've come a long way baby." Other comments on girls smoking:

"Girls are trying to grow up faster."

"They're maturing faster and trying to show it."

" . . . And show their independence. The girls seem to grow up faster than boys."

Several agreed that elementary age children learn the anti-smoking message and try to get the adults in their life to quit. However, that changes as they get older; one problem may be that they don't see any consequences for adults who don't quit. The smokers tended to reject the concept that their smoking affects the likelihood of their children smoking.

A smoker in the group said that neither of her children smoked, and that they came home and broke her cigarettes or hid them from her. Several others told of children trying to make adults stop smoking, including one whose three-year-old would tell strangers to quit. Another, who said she started smoking because she was forbidden to do it, said that when her children were young they were against smoking and tried to get her to quit, but later on they started smoking themselves. The teacher in the group said that although he smokes, he tells his children not to do what he does. His children experimented with smoking but ended up being non-smokers. He rejected the idea that children would end up smoking just because their parents smoked.

When asked how they would feel if their children smoked as high school freshmen, they said:

"I'd be upset."

"I don't think I'd holler and scream . . . I'd sit them down and talk about it."

"If it was a decision made because everyone else is doing it, I'd be very upset."

One said both his children smoked, "not because their mother and dad smoke, but because their friends smoke." He said he had tried to show his children the consequences on lungs.

## Alcohol

The group strongly agreed that both teens and adults are less likely to drink and drive than in the past. Designated drivers were seen as a common trend. One person suggested that adults aren't really drinking less but just drinking more at home. Another said there is enormous peer pressure among teens to go to houses when parents are out and drink up the bar stock.

Most agreed that the bars are still busy, because that's where socialization occurs. "I don't think it's changed that much," said one. "They're just more careful." Another said a lot of drinking and socializing went on among people in their twenties, and the group disagreed about whether or not that was becoming less popular. One said his son goes to the bars "to get hammered," but he walks rather than drives. Another mentioned that bars now offer more entertainment and games, so maybe there is less "getting hammered."

The moderator asked about the influence drinking adults have on their children. One said, "You see these people keeping their children at these festivals till all hours of the night while they're in the beer tent." She described a friend who let her kid sleep under the bar stool and thought it was okay.

Most felt beer tents should be allowed at festivals but some said children should be left at home. One person said it wasn't so bad because the festivals had security and responsible control. Another felt that having the music only in the beer tent was wrong, but another asked, "Where do they make the most money?" Another said:

> "They tried roping people into beer tents at the Taste of Madison festival, and it went downhill for two years. This year you could get your beer and walk around, and the place was mobbed."

One suggested that there shouldn't be drinking at family-oriented events, but most felt that you can't isolate children from it and one even suggested that maybe it doesn't hurt for them to see a drunk falling down. Said another, "The Taste of Madison is principally a daytime event. It was there if you wanted a beer with your food. It didn't offend me."

Almost everyone agreed beer should be sold at the Taste of Madison. Three felt that beer tents should not be allowed at church festivals.

Alcohol is also served at bowling alleys. Once person drinks two beers every bowling night to "loosen up" but claimed not to drink any other time. Most felt it was okay for children to be in bowling alleys. "You can't isolate the kids all the time." Some felt daytime was different than being there at night. And if someone is drunk, said another, "you use it as a learning point."

One participant said, "I see kids in bars all the time . . . on bar stools . . . for two to three hours. What kind of example is that?" He was concerned about the rough language and "making out" going on in bars as well as the drinking. Others also told stories of seeing children in bars with their parents. One said, "If they're having just hamburgers it's okay, or if it's a bar with a restaurant." Another agreed, "There are bars and there are bars. It used to be that taverns were the social place . . . In smaller towns bars are the social center and you

can't keep the kids out."

Most agreed that the purpose for going to the bar, the time of day and the type of bar affected whether children should be allowed to accompany adults. Generally they agreed that children could not be isolated from adult drinking.

## Ideal Messages

The moderator asked what messages about tobacco use should be given to children. Ten said that children should be told not to use it at all. One disagreed, "I wouldn't say outright don't do it because then they'll do it . . . I always let my kids try."

Almost everyone would allow their child to try a sip of beer. One suggested the age of 13 and most agreed. One said, "My husband was European-raised and my kids sipped beer and wine much younger." She also admitted that her older kids like wine and beer now. One participant disagreed, saying that if the parents don't clearly forbid alcohol use, they are condoning it.

All agreed that the message about alcohol should be to encourage responsible use. As one said, "My daughter is 19 and there's beer in the refrigerator, so if she wants it, she's got it. She just can't drink and drive." All believe that the "don't drink and drive" message is a good one and is working.

No one disagreed with the concept that alcohol is part of our social culture. However, they felt drinking too much is no longer seen as funny. Trying to tell children not to drink at all "won't stick" because drinking is glamorized, and because "people need a vice . . . they drink under stress."

One participant, who said she rarely drinks, said her children came home from school with the message that alcohol is bad for you, and then they saw a wine cooler in the refrigerator and told her that she shouldn't be drinking. She agreed that the right message has to be responsible drinking in moderation. She also felt that the parental role modeling has as much influence as peer pressure.

## Illicit Drugs

The moderator asked the group how much drug use they perceived among children. A few parents reported that children start using pot as young as age 13. One person said she knew of marijuana use among 11-year-olds. One parent said his daughters had not seen any drug use in school. One said, "A lot of kids can't afford cocaine but they can afford marijuana."

The group believed that parental involvement and programs such as DARE help prevent drug use, as do programs that keep children busy and involved. They said many children got in trouble after school without adult supervision and with too much time on their hands. One participant told of a child who dialed phone numbers just to talk to someone after school when his parents were still working. Her point was that if parents don't care, children will do things to attract attention. Some felt it was unfair to blame the problem solely on parents.

The moderator asked the group what they worried about most. They said they worried about illegal drugs and the resulting crime and violence. They also worried about drug users' inability to make sound decisions when using drugs, and about a habit causing a need for money and leading to crime. One said, "A drug problem becomes a money problem."

One participant said, "Most of us have drunk or smoked, but we probably haven't had a lot of dealing with drugs and don't know what to tell our kids." When asked if perhaps they were serving as a positive role model by not using illegal drugs, she hesitantly agreed.

When asked about drug use among adults, one person knew several friends who smoked marijuana. Another mentioned a prominent school official who had been caught using drugs.

They perceived the differences between drugs and alcohol as: the consequences of getting caught, what it does to your mind, that it leads to stealing to keep up the habit, it leads to suicides and murder, and the escalating need for more drugs. One person said that drugs "lead to self-destruction of a drastic nature." Two participants referred to local murders: a boy who killed his dealer over a misunderstanding, and a shooting at Memorial High School.

The group agreed that alcohol is part of the social fabric, but other drugs have more severe consequences.

## Programs

The group mentioned DARE, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) and the Just Say No Club as programs in the schools. When asked if there was a support system out there for children who don't want to use drugs, most had fairly blank expressions while one or two were nodding their heads yes. One woman said that the peer pressure gets so strong that it's hard to be strong enough to say no.

One participant said, "To me the message that they have to make their own choices and that their choices matter is most important." He felt that children get more reinforcement about choices and responsibility today than when he was in school. The teacher agreed that there are more programs and peer groups for children today. These programs try to find strong core peer groups of non-users for the children. Some said that sex education also fits into the notion of choices and consequences.

The moderator asked the participants what parents could do to help their children. They replied: try to love them, support their decisions, communicate with them, give them freedom, and teach them to make good decisions.

The group discussed underage drinking. They noted that bar owners are fined for serving underage drinkers. Fraternity parties on campus were seen as a problem. One suggested that underage people should have to wear arm bands, or else hosts should just throw out people who are too young. Half said the drinking age should be 19, or the same as the age for enlistment in the armed forces.

The group gave the following reasons why people drank alcohol: to look more adult, to relieve stress, to "anesthetize themselves against problems and bury pain," to fit in with a group, to feel cool or secure or funny or attractive, and to feel more comfortable around the opposite sex.

The group agreed that the message getting through to children about alcohol use is not enough, and that the problems of adolescence must also be addressed. Ideas included:

> "Have self-esteem classes."
>
> "Teach students to deal with serous problems like death."
>
> "Teach problem-solving skills."
>
> "Build team spirit."
>
> "Help kids develop socialization skills."

The moderator asked who should be addressing the problem. The group said more information should get to the parents ("The kids know more than we do half the time!"), and parents should learn how to talk to their

children, so children feel comfortable bringing their problems to their parents. One mentioned the Families And Schools Together (FAST) program and said it was a way to work with parents to help them work with their children. However, they said they didn't know what to do about children who need help whose parents aren't there for them.

Everyone in the group had taken a drink to relieve stress, to relax or to be sociable. Half felt that such drinking could be done socially. They said the age at which a person could make responsible decisions about drinking varied with the person. They said that the association of alcohol with fun starts at a very young age, perhaps mostly through what they see on TV. Everyone agreed that we do have a problem with children growing up with substance use. They felt that programs like DARE, which stress self-esteem, were very important and effective.

The group agreed that children in Madison needed more recreational opportunities other than drinking and hanging out in shopping malls. They suggested teen clubs, dances, roller skating, and a children's bowling night. They said it was hard to set up such programs because they don't make money: "The bowling alley would rather have men's groups because they drink more, so the bowling alley makes more money." They liked the moderator's idea of volunteer work programs, such as tutoring younger students, perhaps making them mandatory for high school graduation. They said high school students needed to learn responsibility, and the programs would have to make it look like fun.

The group agreed that the message set out by these programs should be responsible decision making. They adamantly agreed that you can't get children to accept the message that they shouldn't drink at all, but children should be informed of the consequences and taught to make wise choices. Some said that drug and alcohol programs may do more good beyond the message itself.

When asked what the consequences or punishment for alcohol use versus drug use should be, they indicated more tolerance and less fear associated with alcohol use than drug use. One participant's son had used drugs and she had taken a tough stance. Her son had responded positively to the consequences she enforced. Some said they didn't think children would listen if their parents forbade substance abuse, but others replied, "Does that mean you never say it?"

The moderator asked what they would do if they caught their children using drugs or alcohol. Their comments:

> "There are so many illegal drugs out there and they are so easy to get. Alcohol use isn't any worse than it was 20 years ago, so you have to put your foot down more on the drug use."
>
> "We'd have a long talk about the consequences of drug use. I think alcohol use is just as bad and dangerous."
>
> "We've grown up with alcohol being legal and drugs illegal. Someone of age can buy alcohol legally."
>
> "I would probably treat liquor differently than harder drugs. It would depend on the circumstances. The drugs would be a tough one."
>
> "We have blinders on about drinking and we don't want to make the tradeoffs to get rid of it."

Most felt there was a difference in how upset they would be about use of hard drugs like crack and LSD and soft drugs like marijuana. One said alcohol was more destructive than marijuana. One said there was a subculture of violence with crack that didn't exist with alcohol or marijuana.

All agreed that the law should be tough on repeat drunk drivers. "Taking their license doesn't work," said one. One suggested, "Show them the destruction they've caused," but another countered, "The blood and gore movies didn't work very well" because young people's feelings of immortality and invincibility kept them from taking warnings seriously. One suggested that an offender should have to do something for the victim. Others felt jail was a good deterrent. One commented, "If you have the disease of alcoholism, no deterrent will

matter." Most were unsure about what was being done now so they were at a loss to suggest improvements.

The moderator asked what should be done to punish drug dealers. They favored tough penalties: "Put him behind bars." "Tattoo his forehead." They showed much more anger about drug offenses than alcohol offenses.

At least two felt that maybe drugs should be legalized and taxed, with the tax money being used to treat dependency. Others said this was tried in Holland and didn't work any better than what we are doing here.

Most agreed that programs for young children need to be continued and strengthened. Children need to be taught responsibility, including responsible use of alcohol. They said we shouldn't teach that alcohol is not good for you, but rather that you shouldn't drink until you are of a responsible age, and then you have to be responsible or lose your rights. One cautioned, "Kids don't suddenly become responsible at 21."

One participant suggested, "Maybe we teach too many don'ts. We are putting adult problems on children's shoulders." All but two said that there should not be glamorous alcohol ads on TV.

Most felt our schools are making a good effort to fight drug and alcohol use, but that we have to keep teaching responsibility, and we have to make sure children have someplace to go, especially those who don't have parents who listen. One participant suggested parents need to learn how to listen uncritically to children.

## Alcohol and Drug Use Focus Groups
## Group #4: Stevens Point
11 November 1992

### Participants

This group had nine participants, three men and six women. All were parents, and six were from dual income families. The participants were:

Lee (M), real estate broker, one 10th grader

Sandy, housewife, children ages 2 and 4

Leroy, disabled construction worker, 10th grade & high school graduate

Merrikay, seasonal work, 2 children in their twenties

Donna, seasonal work and farming, 3 children ages 5, 7, 9

Mark, two children ages 3 and 5

Linda, bakery, 4 children 10, 13, 17, 19

Bonnie, retail, one child age 7, two in their twenties

Judy, two children out of high school

## Problems Facing Children

The moderator asked the group what they felt were the main problems children faced, particularly with reference to the use of alcohol and other drugs. Some said it was hard to find things to do and places to go in their rural area. Some agreed with the participant who said children were "forced to grow up too fast"; she said when she was 12 she was still playing with Barbie dolls, but children today had "done everything" by the time they got to high school. Some complained that TV was too important in children's entertainment, which was bad because it didn't require any imagination or creativity, and because it exposed children to bad influences. One participant said that the things children liked to do cost too much money: "Everything costs $10 or $15 . . . There's no place for them to go that doesn't cost anything." She said it was too bad there was no longer a youth center in town. Another participant disagreed, saying his children "still go for a walk or go to the park or to friends' houses," but he agreed that there was "not a lot to do" for children in his area.

One participant said he worried about what would happen "if they ever start doing drugs." Most said they worried about their children using alcohol or other drugs. Some said alcohol was a bigger worry because it was easier to get. Some were worried most about the auto accidents that could be caused by driving while impaired, and one added that she trusted her children but worried about other drivers. One said the problem was not auto accidents but "the changes in your mental capacity and using it as a crutch to escape the things that affect you as an adolescent." However, all agreed that these worries didn't preoccupy them.

## Drugs in School

Most seemed to feel that drugs were not prevalent in the small schools that their students attended, but they felt there was some alcohol use, as there had always been, even when they themselves were in school. However, they did seem concerned about peer pressure to use drugs and alcohol, and about children's ability to resist that pressure. They seemed to be aware of current anti-drug programs at all grade levels, "from kindergarten on."

Some comments:

"You know it's there, as far as marijuana; I don't know about the harder stuff."

"You have to teach the kids they are strong enough to say no and mean no."

"It used to be [1963] a few people drinking, but not like today. There were no drugs."

"The existence of drugs is not the concern. You have to teach the child how to develop [strength of mind]. Just Say No has nothing to do with it."

"I disagree. If from kindergarten on they are taught about it, they are very impressionable at that age, they bring home worksheets to talk about it."

"It's a problem if they are hanging around with the wrong people."

"They don't ask for IDs in bars or stores like they're supposed to."

"I would never have told my parents [I was drinking] . . . I hope my kids will feel comfortable telling me."

"[Some children] are more resistant to peer pressure . . . [others] will do anything to fit in."

"Just Say No is pretty simplistic . . . It sounds good to adults, and gives them a feeling that they're doing something . . . You need to parent at an early age."

"It's not the drugs and alcohol [that's wrong with the schools], it's the parents."

All agreed that a child from a strong family with good parental involvement and sense of morals was better equipped to handle the temptation or pressure to use alcohol and other drugs. They said real family values — as opposed to the term thrown around in political speeches — had to do with "having a child you want" and "choosing to be with your child." One participant said it was easy for parents to lose touch with their children; they came home tired from work and didn't really listen to what their children had to say; "If you don't listen, the kids won't talk anymore." Another added that too many parents tried to "start talking after they're already in trouble."

The moderator asked whether the group perceived children as smoking more, less, or about the same as in the past. Several said children were smoking less. This reflected the group's own smoking habits; only one was a smoker and several others had quit. The group did not agree about whether children were using alcohol more, less or the same as in the past.

Some participants commented on the messages about alcohol and other drugs that were communicated to children in the media. One said that children would eventually try marijuana, decide that it was not as destructive as they had been led to believe, and then would disbelieve all the anti-drug messages they had heard. He said young people would say to themselves, "They've been scaring me about this for 20 years and it's BS. Everything they said must be BS, so I'm going to try everything." Another agreed, saying the anti-drug messages had been so exaggerated in the 1960s that no one believed them; a few participants laughed and said they had believed the messages. Some participants pointed out that advertising gave conflicting messages: "You see a TV ad saying Just Say No, then the next ad is for Miller beer, with excitement and bikinis."

One participant wondered, "Could it be that American kids want to smoke and drink and do drugs because we spend so much time forbidding it? They see it as a rite of passage . . . I wonder if in Europe they don't have this alcohol problem associated with this age group." Some said this was possible, because people "always want what they can't have. One said that Europe offered no "panacea," and commented that people in Spain smoke five times as much as in the United States. One person said it was human nature for adolescents to want to experiment with forbidden and adult things.

The moderator asked the group about adult drinking habits. Some felt adults were drinking less than in the past, and some said adults were drinking just as much, but were not driving drunk. Some believed adults drank more at home than in bars, but others believed the reverse. One said, "In my social circle, young parents, we don't get drunk anymore . . . maybe it's my generation coming to terms with drinking, saying it wasn't that big a deal, we can still talk and have fun without drinking." Another agreed, "We're getting older, and working harder. You want to spend time with your kids, and you have to get up for work." Another said when he was in college he drank a case of beer a day, and now he still drank two or three beers every day, "but not until after 5 o'clock." One said he didn't believe that "people who drink" drank any less now, but he said, "*we* drink less," meaning that individuals' habits changed, particularly in his social circle, but there were new drinkers taking former drinkers' places.

Later in the group, one participant said her husband was a recovering alcoholic, and commented that friends and family "don't come over any more since my husband quit drinking." Another said her father had broken up her family when she was a child because of his drinking and now she and her siblings are nondrinkers or light drinkers because of it. A third told of a family friend who was an alcoholic whose family forced him to get treatment; she said, "Everyone knew he was an alcoholic, but the family was more embarrassed to say he was in treatment."

Some participants talked about alcohol recovery programs, and one said she believed there were more alcoholics in older age groups (older than 40 and particularly older than 60) than in her own age group (20s and 30s).

Participants said people still drank at tailgate parties, festivals and church picnics, but not as much. There were nondrinkers and light drinkers in every group. Some felt there was less drinking going on at family picnics,

sport outings and happy hours. One said her family was "still cooking brats in the beer left over from my son's graduation party" several years ago. Some said alcohol was still a popular prize for door prizes, raffles and sporting events like softball, but others said they had noticed liquor was becoming a less popular gift in business situations.

The moderator asked how the group felt about drinking at events which were attended by children, such as church picnics. They said it was not really wholesome or a good influence, but they didn't expect things to change because beer tents and liquor raffles raised so much money. One described seeing the church basement full of booths with games for children right next to booths raffling off bottles of booze and cases of beer. Another said that when he moved to Wisconsin, he was amazed to see that "at church picnics they were teaching drinking and gambling."

The group said that Stevens Point had always been known as a big beer drinking town, partly because of the brewery, and partly because of the Polish Catholic population. One said that the number of bars had decreased from 200 to 50 since he moved to town 30 years ago.

One participant said that the crime rate was going up everywhere, and that alcohol seemed to be the root of all crimes from traffic accidents to domestic abuse. All agreed that alcohol was a major contributor to crime. This conflicted with their previous statements that they saw people drinking less, but they had no explanation.

One participant wondered whether alcohol abuse was a cause or an effect of people's problems; another called it a chicken-and-egg situation. One participant said Stevens Point couldn't be compared to larger cities because it was a different emotional and cultural environment; in larger cities children grew up with no sense of self worth, but in Stevens Point people had better values.

The moderator asked whether the group perceived that society gave conflicting messages about drug and alcohol use. Many agreed that adults told children not to drink or smoke, but the adults themselves did.

The moderator asked whether they saw children in bars. Some of the participants said they did see children and teenagers in bars with their families and they were concerned about whether that was a good influence. Because volleyball and softball leagues were often sponsored by bars and because bowling alleys always had bars, they said children were exposed to a drinking environment and had an opportunity to drink illegally.

## Effectiveness of Programs

The moderator asked the group what they knew about anti-drug programs and how effective they believed the programs were. One said, "They teach younger kids more than older kids." Another mentioned an alcohol-free graduation night celebration sponsored by the school; she said it had poor attendance the first year, but another participant said other classes had been more responsive.

The group agreed with the participant who said, "The programs would work if the parents would help -- the schools can't do everything." One participant added that there were a lot of social service programs that would be very effective if they could get enough funding. He said social service programs were always the ones that got cut first. He also said that society wouldn't pay for any kind of programs, from anti-drug messages to highway improvements, until the problem got intolerable. He said there was also a class prejudice at work:

> "As long as it's the lesser people in society using [drugs], the people in the ghettos in the city, we're happy. If we cured the drug problem those people would come boiling out of the cities wanting jobs, so we keep them drugged up."

One participant said that anti-drug and alcohol programs helped by giving children strength, but added that "some kids are just devils" and other were independent and would do what they wanted whether it was good or bad, despite peer pressure or parental advice. One participant said that anti-drug and alcohol programs had

started only recently and it would take time to develop a variety of programs to suit the needs of different people.

One participant said effective programs would not simply tell children to "say no" but would "show them the consequences of using drugs and alcohol.

One participant brought up Students Against Drunk Driving as an example of an anti-alcohol program. Another said she had never been sure whether SADD's message was that students shouldn't drink at all, or that they could drink as long as they didn't drive, or whether it was targeted at adult drinkers. A third compared SADD. to sex education programs that said teens shouldn't have sex, but if they did it should be safe sex: "They are admitting they are drinking, so at least let's keep them alive."

One participant said that cocaine and crack use were declining because anti-drug messages concentrated on them; she said "we allow alcohol and marijuana use because it's a lesser problem."

The moderator asked whether children who didn't want to drink had any support network. Some seemed to feel children had to be strong-minded and independent to fight the abuse trend. Others said it depended on the child's circle of friends and whether drinking was popular or not. Others said that parents and teachers could give a nondrinking child support. One said parents had to tell their children, "There's nothing wrong with you because you don't want to drink or smoke cigarettes."

The group was cynical about society's ideals and goals. They said that if society really believed alcohol and cigarettes were harmful, we would make them illegal, or require equal time in advertising against them. One said, "Most of us don't really believe that it's a big problem . . . We are not really committed."

The group felt that Stevens Point in particular was tolerant or even supportive of drinking in part because of the brewery. One said that "people would have a problem with it" if the Point Brewery were not allowed to advertise or sponsor events. Another added that even nondrinkers would be upset because the brewery was one of the things "little Stevens Point has going for it" and there was a sense of local pride in the company. The group said local organizations depended on the brewery to sponsor charity and fundraising events. They agreed that it was ironic that beer companies sponsored so many sporting events because real athletes wouldn't drink.

## Ideal Messages for Children

The moderator asked the group what messages children should be given about smoking, drinking and using drugs.

They said it would not work to tell children not to use tobacco at all because that was too simplistic; they said children should be shown the many negatives and the lack of good things about tobacco, and encouraged to make up their own minds with the help of their parents (not their friends). They felt children needed to understand they had a choice to make.

The group's message about alcohol use was similar: that instead of being simplistic and trying to force children to "just say no," adults should show children the consequences of drinking. The fact that underage drinking was illegal seemed to be as important to the group as the mental and physical effects and the risk of auto accidents. Some comments:

> "If you say they can't do it, they'll do it."
>
> "If [my kids] want to get drunk, I want to be there."
>
> "They have to learn the consequences first-hand. I don't know how, maybe take them to an emergency room."

"You have to give them a choice, but if they [choose to drink], it's a tough call."

When asked what the message for drug use should be, the group said that alcohol and cigarettes were also drugs, and that all should be treated the same. However, they also seemed to want to forbid use of illegal drugs in a way that they did not find appropriate for alcohol and cigarettes, even though those were illegal for minors to use. One participant made a distinction between "social laws and paper laws"; he said alcohol and cigarette use by minors was socially acceptable, but hard drugs were not. Some comments:

"Drugs bother me more than alcohol because they're illegal."

"But alcohol is a problem for more people."

"I think it's important that a kid know the difference between illegal and legal drugs."

"Kids see [that distinction] as one more example of adults lying to them."

The moderator pointed out that they seemed to feel the major difference between alcohol and hard drugs was that drugs were illegal, and asked if legalizing hard drugs would solve the problem. There was an uncomfortable silence that seemed to indicate a lack of support for the idea. Some said legalization would not solve the problem, and they would prefer stronger enforcement of drug laws. One seemed to feel that legalization of drugs might gradually happen, starting with softer drugs like marijuana, and she said drug abuse should be curbed before they became so popular they were legalized. Some suggested that it made more sense to make alcohol illegal than to make drugs legal, but others said that Prohibition didn't work and its consequences were worse than the original problem.

The moderator continued to probe the group's feelings about the difference between anti-drug messages and anti-alcohol messages. One explained, "I worry about what drugs will do to society. I worry about what alcohol will do to an individual, how that person will react [while driving] on the road."

The moderator asked whether they agreed that the appropriate message for illicit drugs was not to use them at all, and the message for alcohol was to use it responsibly. All but one disagreed, saying that both should be treated the same. However, they admitted that there was a difference between what the law should say and programs should teach (Don't use either) and what a family realistically taught children (Drink responsibly and keep away from drugs).

The moderator asked why they felt crack was worse than alcohol. The group said crack was addictive, illegal, brought problems with trafficking such as violence, crime and gangs, and there was a bad image of the people using it.

Some in the group felt that the media did not glamorize other drugs the way they did alcohol; they said that all the "cop shows" and cartoons on TV showed drugs as bad and drug traffickers as criminals. One implied that the media image didn't have that much effect: "We grew up watching Ozzy and Harriet, but we drank and smoked."

The moderator asked what kind of community support programs would help fight the use of alcohol and other drugs by children. Some felt that communities should offer "something for teens to do that is inexpensive and fun." Others felt that such programs wouldn't work because teens would "drink in the parking lot outside." One suggested that high school students, older teens and younger children should be kept away from each other. The moderator suggested that high school students be involved in volunteer work, and all liked that idea. They said it would build self esteem and expose teens to older people so they could learn "that guy may be 50 or 60 but he's not so bad after all" and build mutual respect.

One participant said, "Our schools need to teach critical thinking skills . . . empathy . . . and an understanding that the things you do have an effect on someone else . . . Teach them to turn outward and assess their priorities." He said these lessons were important in becoming a responsible adult and would also be

applied to drug and alcohol use; he felt these lessons were more important than targeted alcohol and other drug programs.

The moderator asked what society should do with the hard cases, children who used and sold drugs and encouraged others to use them, children who were repeat offenders. The group felt that punishment should be strict for all drug pushers, and that, although minors might need different sentences, both minors and adults should have to serve those sentences in full ("If you do the crime, do the time"). One suggested that one alternative punishment might be to do community service "where they can do something valuable and educational, not punitive." The group's suggestions were to build children's self esteem, and also get tough on enforcement. When asked if offenders should be sent back to the public schools ("with *your* children"), one said, "Send 'em back with a sign on their back." Another said she would want to know why someone was a repeat offender: "What didn't he learn the first time?" The group agreed that putting an offender back into the same school and group of friends would cause repeated offenses. However, they didn't feel relocating students to other schools would help; the student would find the same kind of friends anywhere.

The moderator asked the group how to punish people who supplied alcohol and other drugs to children, such as bartenders and liquor store owners who didn't ask for proof of age, older friends who bought beer, as well as drug pushers. Some comments:

> "Each time they get caught the penalty should be stiffer. Most people are scared out of it the first time they are caught."
>
> "Make the first sentence stiff so they won't do it in the first place."
>
> "See why they are doing it. They are a victim too, maybe they were messed up when they were young."

One participant said he didn't know how anti-drug and alcohol programs could reach " . . . someone who isn't reading the newspaper or getting the message on TV, . . . and everyone they know is doing it so they don't see something wrong with it."

# Quantitative Results of Alcohol and Other Drug Use Survey
# State of Wisconsin

## Methodology

Interviewers spoke with 600 Wisconsin parents of past, present, and future public school children. This sample size allows Chamberlain Research to be 95 percent certain that our results reflect the public school parent population within ±4 percent.

A sample of randomly selected phone numbers was purchased from an independent list house to help avoid sampling bias. Respondents were screened to eliminate nonparents and private school parents. The surveys were then conducted in proportion to public school enrollments by county.

Upon completion, each survey was reviewed by the shift supervisor. At least 10% were re-called or monitored to ensure transcription accuracy. Surveys were then passed to data processing. There, at least 10 percent were verified for keying accuracy. Finally, the complete data set was combed repeatedly for inconsistencies.

(Please note that the demographic comparisons, included in the quantitative analysis, may be based on cells of small size, and therefore may not be statistically significant within a 95 percent confidence interval. However, the trends and conclusions drawn about these groups have been extrapolated to larger samples in cases where trends are supported by other research.)

## Parent Perceptions of Underage Drinking
## Key Points and Supporting Data

1. **Parents of Wisconsin public school children are concerned about underage drinking. The majority describe it as a very serious problem and support school programs that teach abstention from alcohol until age 21 . . . yet many of these same parents undermine the programs by condoning the use of alcohol under several circumstances.**

   - 79.7% rated underage drinking as a very or somewhat serious problem in their community, as compared to illegal drug use (69.7%), unemployment (67.1%), crime (55.3%), and gangs (36.2%).
   - 64.5% prefer schools teach complete abstinence from alcohol as appropriate behavior until age 21.
   - 72.8% would allow their child to taste alcohol before the age of 21, and 52.3% would allow it before the age of 18.
   - Of the 387 parents who said they would like schools to teach abstinence:
     - 50.3% said it is acceptable, at least sometimes, for a child to drink if he or she is almost old enough.
     - 51.7% said it is acceptable either some or all of the time for a child to drink on a special occasion or a holiday.
     - 51.9% said it is acceptable, either some or all of the time, for their child to drink as long as the parents are present.
     - 43.1% said it is acceptable, either some or all of the time, for their child to drink if the parents know about it.

2. **Wisconsin parents of public school children are resigned to the belief that drinking is just another part of coming of age in a state where alcohol is a major part the social culture.**

   - 81.2% strongly or somewhat agreed that there is a phase children go through where they are going to experiment with alcohol no matter what parents or schools do.
   - 69.2% strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that drinking is part of Wisconsin's culture.
   - 68.8% strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that people in Wisconsin drink more than in other states.

3. **For the most part, Wisconsin parents think their schools and communities are doing a good job at encouraging children to remain free of alcohol and other drugs, though some skepticism was voiced with regard to policy enforcement when good athletes were involved. Despite the strong support and encouragement that they believe is available, parents still view underage drinking as serious problem.**

   **They would place the primary responsibility for keeping children drug and alcohol free on themselves as parents.**

   - 83.7% said they strongly or somewhat agreed that there is strong support from their community for children to remain free of alcohol and other drugs.
   - 89.0% strongly or somewhat agreed that there is strong support from schools for children to remain free of alcohol and other drugs.
   - 92.5% said that parents have the primary responsibility for preventing children from using alcohol and other drugs.

- 49.0% said that schools were doing a good or excellent job at curbing underage drinking.
- 43.1% strongly or somewhat agreed that when the best athletes get caught drinking or at the parties, you still see them starting in the next game.

4. Wisconsin parents of public school children are supportive of programs addressing alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA). They do not believe alcohol should be served at school sponsored events, and would prefer alternative sponsors be found for high school sporting events; however, they are not as enthusiastic about eliminating alcohol from many of the Wisconsin pastimes in which they participate, even though many of those activities typically have a large number of children present. Despite their declaration of underage drinking as a serious problem, many did not indicate that they would modify their own behavior as an effort to help rectify the problem.

   - 32.0% said that drug and alcohol education should be incorporated into the curriculum at the kindergarten level, and 69.5% said that public schools should implement AODA education into the curriculum before the fourth grade.
   - 94.3% said that it was never acceptable for parents to throw beer parties for children.
   - 95.7% said that it was never acceptable to serve alcohol at school sponsored events.
   - 17.3% described beer tents as never acceptable at community functions, such as fairs and festivals.
   - 27.8% said that serving alcohol was never acceptable at a professional sporting event.
   - 48.7% said that beer tents at church picnics were never acceptable.
   - 62.0% said that it was always or sometimes acceptable to take a child into a bar to eat or while they have a drink or two.

5. Wisconsin parents of public school children are becoming somewhat more conscious of the ramifications of their own alcohol consumption.

   - 65.7% strongly or somewhat agreed that work places should have some type of regular alcohol screening.
   - 72.5% described alcohol abuse as a very or somewhat serious problem in their community.
   - 80.5% strongly or somewhat agreed that if a parent drinks, their children are more likely to drink.
   - 44.8% strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement that the average Wisconsin adult is a good role model for responsible alcohol consumption.
   - 81.5% strongly or somewhat agreed that drinking in front of children is fine as long as it's done in moderation.

In all the focus groups, parents were more concerned that their children learn moderation and responsible use for life, than not touch a drop of alcohol until the age of 21. They explained that there is no magic age where someone suddenly becomes a responsible drinker. The contradictions appeared because parents want schools to teach what the law describes as appropriate behavior until children reach the age of 21, but want children to learn responsible use for their long-term health and safety. Parents want first-hand responsibility for telling their children under what circumstances it is appropriate to have a drink within social settings before they are 21.

6. Wisconsin parents of public school children find the use of illicit drugs to be far more intolerable than drinking.

- 69.7% strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, "Drugs are totally taboo."
- Roughly 89% would severely discipline a child they caught smoking crack or using acid.
- 22.2% would severely discipline a 17 or 18 year old they caught drinking.

7. Drinking and driving is almost as intolerable as drug use. The hard hitting effects of the public message, don't drink and drive, contradicts school programs. This campaign promotes responsible use as just not driving afterward, not moderation, and certainly not abstention.

Focus groups indicated that people across the entire state had changed their own behavior and were now enforcing these new practices with their children. The conflict arises around the don't drink at all message. As confirmed by the data at the beginning of this report, parents typically refer to the enormity of the underage drinking problem, but tend not to connect their own behavior to the problem.

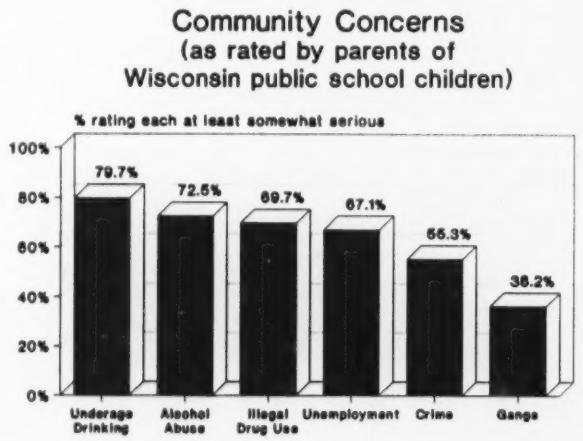
- 82.2% would severely discipline a child they caught drinking and driving.
- 44.8% said it was acceptable at least sometimes for children to drink as long as they did not drive afterwards.

## Detailed Findings

### *Community Concerns*

The interview began by attempting to understand community concerns and at what level parents placed underage drinking among those concerns. First, respondents were asked what they would describe as the most important problem facing their communities today. As expected, property tax was the most popular response.

Next, survey participants were asked to rate the severity of several problems people typically list as afflicting their communities: crime, alcohol abuse, gangs, illegal drug use, unemployment, and underage drinking. Overall statewide, the greatest number of people ranked underage drinking as at least a somewhat serious problem in their community.




This was not true of people living in cities with over 250,000 people. Underage drinking was rated as a problem by the least number of people in this category. In both Dane and Milwaukee Counties, underage drinking concerned fewer parents than did either crime or illegal drug use.

All of the issues were ranked as at least somewhat serious by more females than males. Women most noticeably diverged from men on both alcohol abuse (+14.9%) and underage drinking (+12.0%).

### *Personal Use*

Almost one-third (31.3%) of Wisconsin's parents of public school children admitted that they were still smoking. Respondents in Ozaukee, Racine, and Kenosha counties had a higher proportion of smokers than any other area in the state. The percentage of smokers decreased with increasing levels of education. Age did not appear to be a factor, however, non-married respondents and those with a household income under $25,000 had a higher tendency to smoke. The majority (69.7%) of these smokers reported that their children do put pressure on them to quit. Later in the survey, respondents were asked if any of their children smoke. Just over 13% were aware that at least one of their children smoked. This data did not confirm that smokers are more likely than non-smokers to have children who smoke.

Roughly one-fifth (20.8%) of the survey participants said that they never keep alcohol in their house. Another 20.2% stated that they stock it, but almost never drink it. The largest percentage (32.7%) claimed that they keep alcohol around for special occasions and guests. Just over three percent (3.3%) described themselves as frequently having friends over and serving alcohol. The remaining portion (22.4%) admitted to having a few drinks on the weekend, after work or with dinner. (0.7% did not know how to rate their alcohol consumption.)

Older parents (ages 45-54) were more likely to describe themselves as stocking alcohol, but almost never drinking it. Dane County residents were the most willing to admit some type of regular alcohol consumption; 40% admitted to

having a drink or two after work, with dinner, or having a few on the weekend. The level of self-described consumption increased with self-described income. Over half (53.3%) of those reporting household incomes under $25,000 also said that they either never stock or almost never drink alcohol. Similarly, those reporting household incomes over $75,000 were more likely to describe themselves as having a drink or two after work, with dinner, or a few on the weekend (35.2%). More men than women admitted to drinking with some regularity.

### *Perceptions*

Next, survey participants were read nine statements and asked to respond to each with strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. All of the statements were derived from the focus groups during the first stage of this study.

**"I think people are smoking less than they used to."**
Almost eighty percent (79.2%) of the parents surveyed agreed. Belief increased with age, education, and income. Men (84.7%) were also more likely to believe this statement than women (74.2%).

**"Instead of drinking less, people are drinking at home more."**
In each of the four focus groups the moderator asked if the participants thought people were drinking more, less, or about the same amount as in years past. Someone always responded by saying, I think people are drinking at home more, then typically expanded this comment with the consequences of drinking and driving.

Just over two-thirds (67.2%) of the survey participants agreed that people are drinking at home more. Belief was strongest in the Milwaukee County area. There was a slight decrease in agreement as age increased. Those with a college degree or more were also less likely to accept this idea.

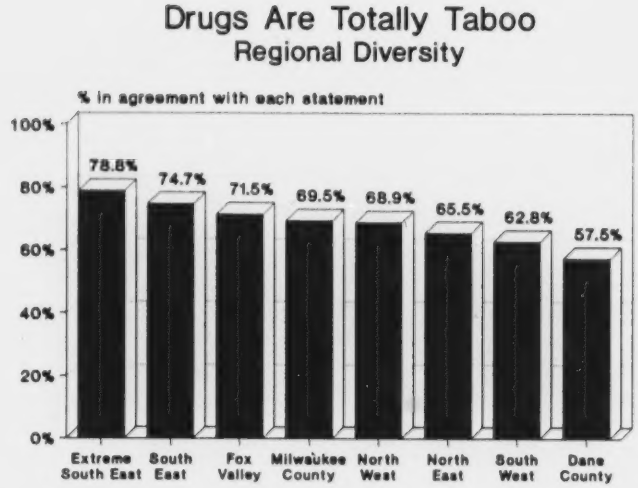
**"I think people in Wisconsin drink more than in other states."**
**"Drinking is part of Wisconsin's culture."**
This survey confirmed the self-proclaimed stereotype of the Wisconsin drinker. Roughly sixty-nine percent (68.8%, 69.2% respectively) of the parents surveyed agreed with both statements. Fox Valley residents were the most agreeable, 86.3% and 79.4% respectively. College graduates were also more likely to agree with both of these assertions.

**"If bars did not sponsor baseball teams, the leagues would probably stop."**
This fear surfaced during a focus group in the Fox Valley, where the "bar leagues" are a popular activity for the twenty-something crowd. The majority (59.3%) of those polled did not agree. Agreement further decreased as income increased. A few more of the younger parents (age 25-34) did find this statement believable.

**"Work places should have some type of regular alcohol screening."**
Just under two-thirds (65.7%) of the parents surveyed agreed with this idea. The educational correlation was tenuous. Agreement was highest at the educational extremes: high school graduates and those having completed postgraduate work. The Dane County area was the least supportive of this idea (52.2%), and men (60.5%) were less supportive than women (70.4%).

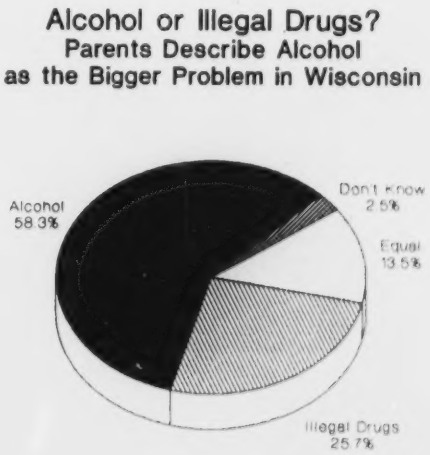
**"People in Wisconsin are so anti-drug that they overlook drinking as a problem."**
The overall majority (60.3%) of the respondents agreed, with the exception of those in Ozaukee, Racine, and Kenosha counties where the majority (53.2%) disagreed. During the focus group in Kenosha many of the participants volunteered comments about their depressed economy. They added that drinking goes hand in hand with economic strife, because people can always find that couple of dollars for a six-pack. Some of the participants who worked in Racine and Kenosha's major factories told stories about the alcohol programs and policies that are already used by their companies. It became evident that this area had had problems with alcohol in the past, and now had programs in place to combat the more dangerous consequences. This was not true in some of the other locations, where people told tales of supervisors providing the Friday afternoon beer amidst the heavy machinery. Other demographics did not show a correlation.

**"Drugs are totally taboo."**
Nearly seventy percent (69.7%) of the parents surveyed agreed that drugs are totally taboo. Agreement increased with age and income. The graph to the right shows the regional comparisons. Please remember that the differences may not be significant due to the small sample sizes in each region, but this data is consistent with what has been observed in previous studies.




**"Marijuana does not bother me as much as the other illegal drugs."**
The majority (65.5%) of the respondents disagreed with this statement. Parents in the Northeast were most likely to disagree with the idea that marijuana is less dangerous than other drugs, and those in Dane County were the least likely to disagree. Agreement increased with education.

Respondents were asked which they believed to be the bigger problem in Wisconsin: alcohol or illegal drugs. Almost sixty percent (58.3%) of the parents surveyed assessed alcohol to be the bigger problem. (See graph to the right.)




Milwaukee County was the only region of the state where respondents believed illegal drugs were as big a problem as alcohol. Those in the Northwest expressed the least concern over illegal drugs; only eight of the 90 individuals surveyed said illegal drugs were the bigger problem. Alcohol became the more problematic as education and income increased.

Next, parents were asked to rate the acceptability of several Wisconsin pastimes.

Serving alcohol at school sponsored events and parents throwing beer parties for children were described as never acceptable by over ninety percent (94.3% and 95.7% respectively) of the parents surveyed.

Happy hour was deemed as acceptable, at least some of the time, by almost two-thirds (64.2%) of those surveyed. Disapproval increased with age, and decreased with income. College graduates (78.1%) were the most tolerant of this pastime, and females found it acceptable more often than males. Dane County and Fox Valley parents described happy hour as at least sometimes acceptable more often than parents in the rest of the state.

Beer tents at church picnics were seen as acceptable by about half (50.5%) of those surveyed. The majority, over sixty percent, of those in the Northern and Southwestern portions of the state described beer tents as never acceptable. College graduates were again the most tolerant. Acceptance increased with age and income. Men (55.9%) approved of this long-standing Wisconsin practice more often than women (45.5%).

Beer tents at community fairs and festivals were found to be acceptable, at least sometimes, by most (82.2%). Acceptance increased with income, and decreased as age increased. Over ninety percent (92.5%) of the Dane County parents surveyed approved of beer tents at community festivals at least some of the time. This was higher than in any other region.

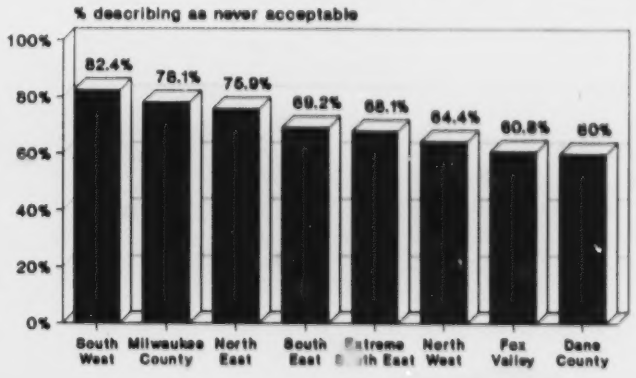
Just over sixty percent (61.4%) of the respondents stated that drinking at tailgate parties before athletic events is at least sometimes acceptable. Men (67.5%) were far more supportive of this pastime than women (55.7%). Acceptance decreased with age, and increased with income. Again, the majority of those in the Northern and Southwestern portions of the state described tailgate drinking as never acceptable. Again, college graduates were least likely to find this activity unacceptable.

Serving alcohol at professional sporting events was reported to be acceptable, at least sometimes, by over seventy percent (71.5%) of the respondents. College graduates also found this activity more acceptable than those with less education. Acceptability increased with income. Men (79.0%) were more likely to describe this association as acceptable than women (64.7%).

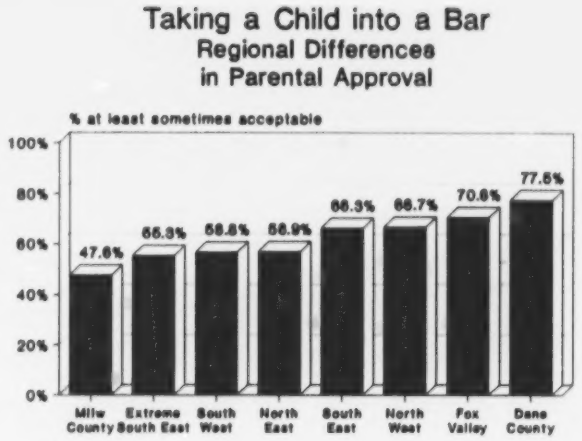
Community block parties were described as at least sometimes acceptable by almost three-fourths (73.1%) of the parents surveyed. Acceptance decreased as age and education increased. Those living in the Northwest region were least likely to find this activity acceptable. Parents with household incomes over $50,000 were also more accepting of this activity.

Telling children to run to the refrigerator for a beer was reported to be unacceptable by the majority (69.7%) of those parents surveyed. Men were more accepting of this habit than women. Acceptance increased with age and income. Those in the Southwestern portion of the state were the most opposed to this practice. See graph to the right for further regional comparisons.

## Getting a Beer for Mom and Dad
### Regional Differences in Parental Disapproval



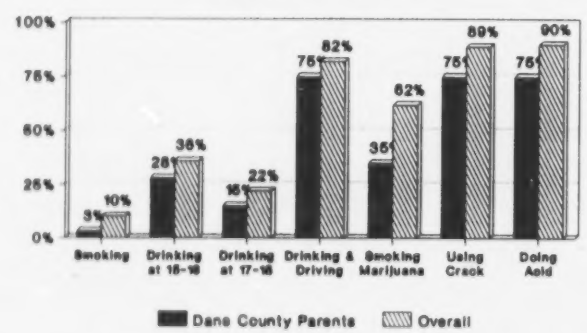
Respondents were asked how acceptable they believe it is to take a child into a bar to eat or while the adult has a few drinks. Over sixty percent (62.0%) of these parents described this practice as at least sometimes acceptable. Acceptance increased with age. The majority of those parents from cities of over 250,000 people described this behavior as never acceptable. For regional differences please refer to the graph to the right.




Next, parents were read a list of several things they might catch their child doing. After each, interviewers asked if the respondent would do nothing at all, have a discussion but give no punishment, have a discussion and give a minor punishment, have a discussion and give a moderate punishment, or have a discussion and give a severe punishment. This question was designed to reveal the relative severity of underage drinking.

Just under ninety percent (89.5%) of these parents would give their child a severe punishment for smoking crack or using acid. Slightly fewer (82.2%) placed drinking and driving in this category. Smoking marijuana was described as deserving of a severe punishment by over sixty percent (62.0%) of those surveyed. Drinking at age 15 and 16 was deemed worthy of a severe punishment by little more than a third (35.5%), and drinking at age 17 or 18 by even fewer (22.2%). For smoking, the largest share of parents (44.7%) would just have a discussion with their child.

For all of these behaviors, Dane County parents were consistently more lenient than those in any other area of the state. (Please see the graph to the right.) The discipline level for smoking and for driving after drinking increased with education level. People who had not had any formal education beyond high school were much more likely to rate smoking marijuana as deserving of a severe punishment.



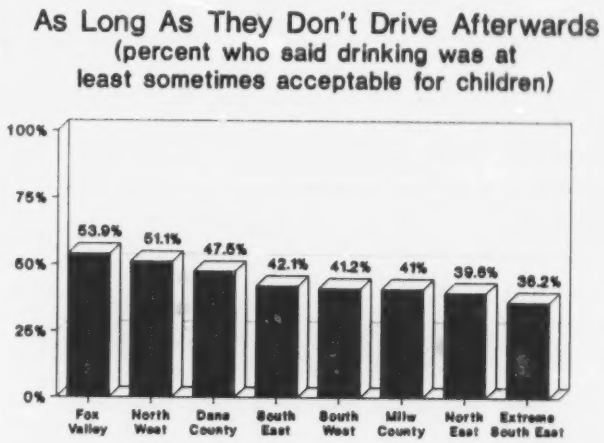

Throughout the series of focus groups, parents typically admitted that there were times that they believed it was OK for minors to drink alcohol. The following portion of the survey was designed to test the acceptance of those parental beliefs at the statewide level.

First, parents were asked at what age they will let/did let their children have their first sip of alcohol. Over half (52.3%) volunteered an answer that was under the age of 18, and over seventy percent (72.8%) said something lower than 21.

Then interviewers read respondents a list of eight circumstances where a parent might allow a child to drink alcohol, and asked them whether it was acceptable all of the time, acceptable sometimes, or never acceptable. Forty to sixty percent found them acceptable at least some of the time.

**"As long as they're almost old enough."**
Just over fifty-seven percent (57.2%) of the survey participants think that this is acceptable at least some of the time. Acceptance decreased as education increased. Those parents living in cities of between 50,000 and 250,000 were the most likely to find this behavior acceptable.

**"As long as they don't drive afterwards."**
Roughly forty-five (44.8%) percent of the parents surveyed found this acceptable at least some of the time. Those with an annual household income over $75,000 were the least likely to describe this behavior as ever acceptable. (Please refer to the graph to the right for regional comparisons.)




**"As long as they just have one or two."**
Approximately forty-two percent (42.5%) believe that this is acceptable at least some of the time. Those having completed post graduate work and those making over $75,000 were the least accepting of this behavior.

**"As long as there is an adult present."**
Forty-eight percent of the respondents believe this is at least somewhat acceptable. Parents ages 35 to 44 and those who had completed some postgraduate education were the most likely to find this behavior unacceptable. Those with an annual household income under $25,000, those living in cities of 50,000 to 250,000, and Dane County parents were the most tolerant of this practice.

**"As long as it's only beer or wine."**
Just over forty-six (46.3%) of the public school parent population found this behavior acceptable at least some of the time. Acceptance decreased with income and education level. Dane County parents were, again, the more tolerant of this idea than those in other areas of Wisconsin. Those living in cities with more than 50,000 people (55.8%) were more accepting than those living in smaller communities (44.4%).

**"As long as it's a special occasion, like a wedding or a holiday"**
Over sixty percent (60.5%) described this as acceptable some or all of the time. Again, the participants between the ages of 35 and 44 were the least-accepting age group. Those living in cities of between 50,000 and 250,000 people were more accepting than those who reported living in both larger and smaller cities. Acceptance decreased with education.

**"As long as I know about it."**
Roughly fifty-two percent (51.7%) described drinking as acceptable, at least sometimes, under these circumstances. Those having completed postgraduate work were the least tolerant educational level. Again, those living in cities of 50,000 to 250,000, and those with an annual household income below $25,000, were the most accepting.

**"As long as I'm there."**
Fifty-nine percent of the respondents described this as acceptable some or all of the time. Tolerance decreased with education. Again, those living in cities with 50,000 to 250,000 people were more accepting of this practice than those living in both smaller and larger communities, as were those reporting an household income of less than $25,000 when compared to those earning more.

When these parents were asked what they thought the legal drinking age should be, just over forty-four percent (44.5%) volunteered an age under the current legal limit of 21. Dane County residents were the least supportive of the 21-year-old drinking age, followed by those in the Fox Valley. Those in cities with over 250,000 people were the more supportive of the 21-year-old limit than those in smaller cities. Those who had completed postgraduate work volunteered the age of 21 more often than those at lower education levels.

Next, parents were presented with a hypothetical situation and asked how they would respond. The situation: a group of high school children from their neighborhood are drinking at a house where they know the parents are away. Less than twelve percent (11.4%) said they would do nothing at all. Roughly six percent (5.7%) said they would break up the party, but not tell the parents. Just over thirty-five percent (35.5%) said they would call the police. Twenty-four percent said they would call the parents as soon as they got home. The remaining twenty-one percent said they would break up the party and than tell the parents.

Participants ages 45 to 54 were the most likely to call the police. Those with an annual household income under $25,000 were the most likely to do nothing (21%).

## *Behavior*

The following section consisted of 20 statements about the behavior of children. The statements were developed from the context of the focus group discussions. Parents were asked if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each statement.

**"Peer pressure is the biggest problem facing kids today."**
Almost ninety-five percent (94.5%) of the parents surveyed said they strongly or somewhat agreed that peer pressure is the biggest problem facing children today. The same overwhelming agreement was found during the focus groups.

## *Smoking*

**"People in stores and gas stations rarely ask kids for IDs when purchasing cigarettes."**
Three-fourths (75.1%) of the survey participants agreed with this statement. Demographic trends were tenuous.

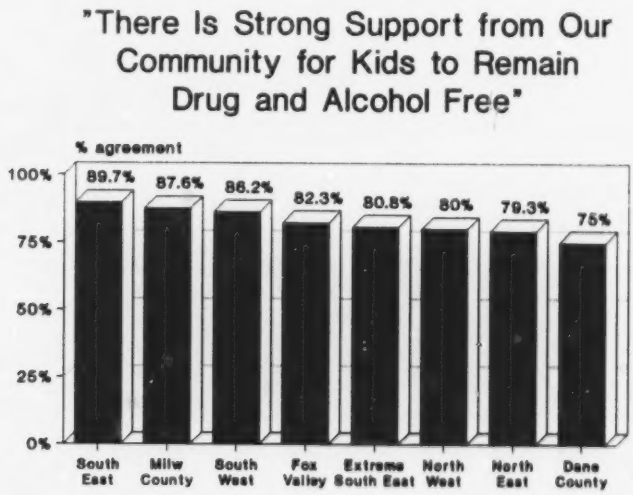
**"Young girls are smoking more than in days gone by."**
Almost seventy percent (69.2%) agreed with this statement.

**"A lot of cigarette ads are targeted toward kids."**
Over sixty percent (62.5%) agreed that this was true. Agreement was highest among 25- to 34-year-olds, and those who had completed postgraduate work.

*Drinking*

**"If my child is going to experiment with alcohol anyway, I'd rather have them at home where I can supervise."**
Over eighty percent (81.2%) of the parents surveyed said they strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement.

**"There is strong support from our community for kids to remain drug and alcohol free."**
Over eighty percent (83.5%) of the respondents agreed with this assertion. (Please see the graph of regional comparisons below.)




When the parents who participated in the focus groups were asked why children drink, the next eight statements were the most popular responses.

**"Kids drink because there is nothing for them to do in this town."**
The majority (59.0%) of parents surveyed disagreed with this statement. Females (47.8%) were more likely to believe this than males (30.7%). Those in cities of fewer than 10,000 found this idea more plausible than those in larger cities. Agreement decreased with income (60.0% of those earning under $25,000 agreed, as opposed to only 18.6% of those making over $75,000.) Those who earned a college degree or completed postgraduate work were less likely to agree with the statement than those with less education.

**"Kids drink because their friends do."**
Ninety-five percent of the parents surveyed said they strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement.

**"Kids drink because of low self-esteem."**
Seventy percent of the respondents indicated that they strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement. Respondents 35 to 44 years old, and those having completed postgraduate work were more agreeable to this idea than their counterparts. Females (77.4%) were more likely to strongly or somewhat agree with this statement than males (61.9%).

**"Kids drink because they don't have a lot to look forward to in terms of jobs and a better standard of living than their parents."**
The majority (67%) did not agree with this idea. Disagreement was higher with 45-54 year old parents, and lower with those who have completed a college degree or some postgraduate work. Agreement was lower among those living in cities of 50,000 to 250,000, and higher in cities of over 250,000. Agreement was also much higher among females and those earning less than $25,000 a year. This sentiment was passionately aired during the Racine and Kenosha focus group, but interestingly, it was not confirmed by the survey results in those areas.

**"The decline of the nuclear family has led to more underage drinking."**
Over seventy percent (71.5%) of the parents surveyed strongly or somewhat agreed. Those parents from the Dane County were least likely to agree with this statement.

**"Kids drink because we tell them they can't."**
Roughly sixty-six percent (65.8%) either strongly or somewhat agreed with this idea. Young parents (25-34) were more likely to agree, whereas those with a college degree or more were less likely to agree. Agreement decreased with increasing income.

**"There is a phase kids go through where they are going to experiment with alcohol no matter what parents or schools do."**
The majority (81.2%) of those surveyed agreed with this statement. Agreement decreased with increasing income. Those with a college degree or more were also less likely to agree.

**"Kids who don't drink feel like nerds."**
Not quite forty percent (39.5%) of the parents surveyed agreed with this statement.

*Role Modeling*

**"If a parent smokes their children are more likely to smoke"**
Almost eighty percent (79.2%) of the parents surveyed either strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement. Fewer of the younger parents, those 25 to 34, believed this. Agreement was higher among those who had completed some post graduate education, and those who described their annual household income as greater than $75,000. Women were less likely to agree than men.

**"If a parent drinks, their children are more likely to drink."**
Approximately eighty percent (80.5%) of the sample agreed with this statement. Those with a college degree or more were more agreeable. Agreement increased with income. Over ninety (91.5%) of those in Ozaukee-Racine-Kenosha counties believed this assertion, as compared to seventy-five percent in the Dane County area.

**"Beer and liquor companies should not be allowed to sponsor high school sporting events."**
Roughly eighty percent (80.3%) agreed with this idea. Those in cities of over 250,000 people were least likely to agree.

**"I don't drink in front of my children."**
The majority of these parents disagreed with this statement. Men were more likely to partake in this behavior than women. Interestingly, women were not more likely to agree that parents who drink are more likely to have children who drink. Younger parents (ages 25 to 34), and those who had not attained a college degree, were more likely to agree with this statement. Agreement decreased as income increased.

**"Drinking in front of children is fine as long as it's done in moderation."**
Over eighty percent (81.5%) of the respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement. Those with an annual household income under $25,000 were less likely to agree.

**"The average Wisconsin adult is a good role model for responsible alcohol consumption."**
About half (50.5%) agreed with this assertion. Older parents (ages 45 to 54) were more likely to agree with this idea. Those who had completed some postgraduate work were most skeptical of this remark.

Despite the fact that only about half of the parents think Wisconsin adults are good role models for responsible alcohol consumption, practically all of them (92.5%) think parents should have the primary responsibility for keeping children free of alcohol and other drugs. This same sentiment was voiced throughout the focus groups. Concern arose because most believe that there is a segment of parents who are not providing a home atmosphere conducive to a child remaining drug and alcohol free. No solution was agreed upon.

## *Schools*

The last portion of the survey addressed the school's role in alcohol and drug prevention.

Eighty-nine percent believe schools provide strong support for children to remain free of alcohol and other drugs. However this encouragement may not be enough, since only about half described the public schools as doing a good job at keeping children drug free and curbing underage drinking.

During the focus groups a few mothers suggested that some of the current school programs and discussions made their children feel like they had to come up with something wrong with their family. About one-third (34.0%) of those surveyed agreed. Those from smaller cities, and those with an annual household income under $50,000 were more likely to agree with this notion.

Another idea that surfaced during the focus groups was that when the best athletes were caught drinking or at parties they would still be seen starting in the next game. Just over forty-three percent (43.1%) of the parents surveyed agreed.

About twenty percent (18.2%) did not know when schools start to incorporate drug and alcohol education into the curriculum. Most (67.6%) thought is was sometime before fifth grade.

Parents were then asked at what grade level they thought schools should be incorporating this type of education into the curriculum. Nearly one-third (32.0%) thought it should begin at the kindergarten level, and most (87.0%) said sometime during the elementary level. More women than men suggested that schools should start prevention at the kindergarten level. Older parents (ages 45 to 54) were less likely encourage drug and alcohol education at the kindergarten level.

The majority (61.1%) believe that public schools advocate no use of alcohol until the age of 21, and about the same amount (64.5%) believe this to be the appropriate behavior for schools to teach. Of the parents who would prefer the schools teach abstinence, about half would still allow their children to drink if they were almost old enough, if it were a special occasion or holiday, or if the parent was present.

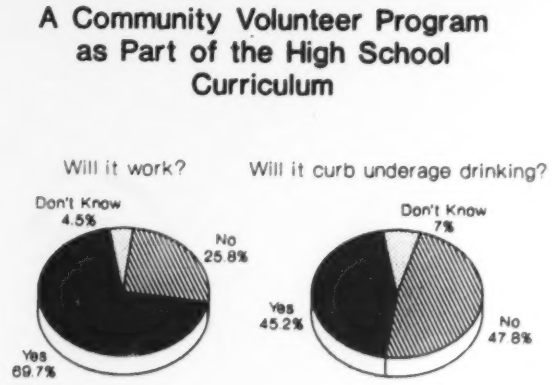
Of those parents who preferred that schools promote complete abstinence from alcohol, the largest portion said that schools should teach that message because it is the law. This reasoning may explain why such a large portion of these parents described instances where they would allow their child to drink. For example, if the parent is present no law is being broken. Several others also expressed their concern that children do not understand moderation. Most of the parents who said they would prefer schools teach responsible use believe that children will not abstain from alcohol.

Next, parents were asked what they thought was the best way to curb underage drinking. The most common response was, "educate kids about the ramifications and consequences." Some of their other suggestions included: better

parental supervision, role modeling, talking and listening to children, keeping children active, stronger laws, and maybe even a curfew.

During the focus groups, someone raised the idea of incorporating some type of volunteer community service program into the high school curriculum. Most of the participants approved of a program of this type because it would keep children busy, help improve their self esteem, and teach responsibility. This sentiment was echoed, though not quite as strongly, by the survey participants. (Please see graph below.)

Almost seventy percent (69.7%) felt a program of this type would work. Just over forty-five percent (45.2%) thought it would have a positive effect on underage drinking. The reasons they listed for its plausible success were the same as those listed in the focus groups.




Females reacted more positively to this program than males. Dane County parents, and those with annual household incomes over $75,000 were the most supportive of this idea.

**Appendix:**

**Survey Instrument with Raw Data**

**ALCOHOL SURVEY--RAW DATA** **January 5, 1993**

Hello, this is _____ from WISCONSIN RESEARCH. Today we're conducting a survey with Wisconsin residents about issues affecting their communities. Are you the parent or guardian of anyone under 26 years of age? **(IF NOT, TERMINATE)** Will or have your children attended a public school? **(IF NOT, TERMINATE)**

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS

1. What is the most important problem facing your community today? What is the first thing your legislators need to address? **(PROBE!)**

_____

2. Thinking only about your community, please tell me how seriously the following problems are affecting your community. Would you say . . . is a very serious problem, somewhat of a problem, not a very serious problem, or not at all a problem?

| | | Very Serious | Somewhat Serious | Not a very Serious Problem | Not a Problem | DK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Crime | 125 | 207 | 210 | 57 | 1 |
| | | 20.8% | 34.5% | 35.0% | 9.5% | 0.2% |
| b. | Alcohol abuse | 174 | 261 | 109 | 32 | 24 |
| | | 29.0% | 43.5% | 18.2% | 5.3% | 4.0% |
| c. | Gangs | 91 | 126 | 140 | 230 | 13 |
| | | 15.2% | 21.0% | 23.3% | 38.3% | 2.2% |
| d. | Illegal drug use | 178 | 240 | 102 | 50 | 30 |
| | | 29.7% | 40.0% | 17.0% | 8.3% | 5.0% |
| e. | Unemployment, layoffs, and factory or other business closings | 185 | 218 | 120 | 69 | 8 |
| | | 30.8% | 36.3% | 20.0% | 11.5% | 1.3% |
| f. | Underage drinking | 229 | 249 | 75 | 21 | 26 |
| | | 38.2% | 41.5% | 12.5% | 3.5% | 4.3% |

## PERCEPTIONS

3a. Do you smoke?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 188 |
| | 31.3% |
| No | 412 |
| | 68.7% |

3b. **IF SMOKER:** Do your children put pressure on you to quit?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 131 |
| | 69.7% |
| No | 55 |
| | 29.3% |
| DK | 2 |
| | 1.1% |

4. Which of the following best describes the use of alcohol in your household?

| | |
|---|---|
| We never have any alcohol in the house | 125<br>20.8% |
| We stock it, but almost never drink it | 121<br>20.2% |
| We have it around for special occasions or guests | 196<br>32.7% |
| We frequently have friends over and serve alcohol | 20<br>3.3% |
| We like to have a drink or two after work or with dinner | 45<br>7.5% |
| We like to have a few drinks on the weekend | 89<br>14.8% |
| DK | 4<br>0.7% |

5. I'm going to read you a list of comments we've heard from parents around the state. Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each.

| | | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | I think people are smoking less than they used to | 267<br>44.5% | 208<br>34.7% | 61<br>10.2% | 60<br>10.0% | 4<br>0.7% |
| b. | I think people in Wisconsin drink more than in other states | 266<br>44.3% | 147<br>24.5% | 66<br>11.0% | 48<br>8.0% | 73<br>12.2% |
| c. | Instead of drinking less, people are drinking at home more | 196<br>32.7% | 207<br>34.5% | 86<br>14.3% | 42<br>7.0% | 69<br>11.5% |
| d. | Drinking is part of Wisconsin's culture | 232<br>38.7% | 183<br>30.5% | 72<br>12.0% | 102<br>17.0% | 11<br>1.8% |
| e. | If the bars did not sponsor baseball teams, the leagues would probably stop | 100<br>16.7% | 110<br>18.3% | 143<br>23.8% | 213<br>35.5% | 34<br>5.7% |
| f. | Work places should have some type of regular alcohol screening | 243<br>40.5% | 151<br>25.2% | 90<br>15.0% | 107<br>17.8% | 9<br>1.5% |
| g. | People in Wisconsin are so anti-drug that they overlook drinking as a problem | 179<br>29.8% | 183<br>30.5% | 116<br>19.3% | 112<br>18.7% | 10<br>1.7% |

| | | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| h. | Drugs are totally taboo | 330 | 88 | 76 | 90 | 16 |
| | | 55.0% | 14.7% | 12.7% | 15.0% | 2.7% |
| i. | Marijuana does not bother me as much as the other illegal drugs | 73 | 112 | 78 | 315 | 22 |
| | | 12.2% | 18.7% | 13.0% | 52.5% | 3.7% |

6. Which do you think is a bigger problem in Wisconsin: alcohol or illegal drugs (such as marijuana or cocaine)?

| | |
|---|---|
| Alcohol | 350 |
| | 58.3% |
| Illegal drugs | 154 |
| | 25.7% |
| Both the same **(DO NOT OFFER)** | 81 |
| | 13.5% |
| DK | 15 |
| | 2.5% |

7. I'm going to read you several activities. For each, please tell me if you find it acceptable all of the time, acceptable some of the time, or never acceptable?

| | | All | Sometimes | Never | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Happy hour | 51 | 334 | 202 | 13 |
| | | 8.5% | 55.7% | 33.7% | 2.2% |
| b. | Parents throwing beer parties for kids | 2 | 28 | 566 | 4 |
| | | 0.3% | 4.7% | 94.3% | 0.7% |
| c. | Beer tents at church picnics | 95 | 208 | 292 | 5 |
| | | 15.8% | 34.7% | 48.7% | 0.8% |
| d. | Beer tents at community functions, such as fairs and festivals | 187 | 306 | 104 | 3 |
| | | 31.2% | 51.0% | 17.3% | 0.5% |
| e. | Drinking at tailgate parties before athletic events | 130 | 238 | 221 | 11 |
| | | 21.7% | 39.7% | 36.8% | 1.8% |
| f. | Serving alcohol at school sponsored events | 5 | 16 | 574 | 5 |
| | | 0.8% | 2.7% | 95.7% | 0.8% |
| g. | Serving alcohol at professional sporting events | 207 | 222 | 167 | 4 |
| | | 34.5% | 37.0% | 27.8% | 0.7% |
| h. | Community block party | 191 | 248 | 145 | 16 |
| | | 31.8% | 41.3% | 24.2% | 2.7% |

## RULES AND ROLE MODELING FOR CHILDREN

8. Telling a child to run and get Mommy or Daddy a beer from the refrigerator is a pretty familiar scenario. How do you feel about that--do you think that's acceptable or not?

| | |
|---|---|
| Acceptable | 72<br>12.0% |
| Acceptable Sometimes | 104<br>17.3% |
| Never Acceptable | 418<br>69.7% |
| DK | 6<br>1.0% |

9. Some people think it's OK to take their children into a bar to eat, or while they have a drink or two. Others think it's not OK. What about you? Do you think this is acceptable all of the time, sometimes, or is it never acceptable?

| | |
|---|---|
| All | 73<br>12.2% |
| Some | 299<br>49.8% |
| Never | 226<br>37.7% |
| DK | 2<br>0.3% |

10. I'm going to read you a list of things parents have been known to catch children doing. If you caught your child . . . , what would you do: nothing at all, have a discussion but give no punishment, discussion and minor punishment, discussion and moderate punishment, or discussion and severe punishment?

| | Nothing | Disc. Only | Minor | Moderator | Severe | DK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Smoking | 5<br>0.8% | 268<br>44.7% | 139<br>23.2% | 123<br>20.5% | 60<br>10.0% | 5<br>0.8% |
| b. Drinking at age 15 or 16 | 2<br>0.3% | 91<br>15.2% | 125<br>20.8% | 166<br>27.7% | 213<br>35.5% | 3<br>0.5% |
| c. Drinking at age 17 or 18 | 10<br>1.7% | 142<br>23.7% | 122<br>20.3% | 189<br>31.5% | 133<br>22.2% | 4<br>0.7% |
| d. Drinking and driving | --<br> | 26<br>4.3% | 27<br>4.5% | 50<br>8.3% | 493<br>82.2% | 4<br>0.7% |
| e. Smoking marijuana | --<br> | 71<br>11.8% | 39<br>6.5% | 112<br>18.7% | 372<br>62.0% | 6<br>1.0% |
| f. Smoking crack | --<br> | 23<br>3.8% | 16<br>2.7% | 18<br>3.0% | 535<br>89.2% | 8<br>1.3% |
| g. Doing acid | --<br> | 23<br>3.8% | 13<br>2.2% | 15<br>2.5% | 537<br>89.5% | 12<br>2.0% |

11. **At what age did you, or would you, let your child try their first sip of beer, wine, or liquor?**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| One | 4<br>0.7% | Nine | 5<br>0.8% | Sixteen | 84<br>14.0% |
| Two | 12<br>2.0% | Ten | 33<br>5.5% | Seventeen | 30<br>5.0% |
| Three | 7<br>1.2% | Eleven | 2<br>0.3% | Eighteen | 112<br>18.7% |
| Four | 1<br>0.2% | Twelve | 22<br>3.7% | *Nineteen* | *6*<br>1.0% |
| Five | 10<br>1.7% | Thirteen | 20<br>3.3% | Twenty | 5<br>0.8% |
| Six | 12<br>2.0% | Fourteen | 28<br>4.7% | Twenty-one | 130<br>21.7% |
| Seven | 9<br>1.5% | Fifteen | 27<br>4.5% | Never | 34<br>5.7% |
| Eight | 7<br>1.2% | | | | |

12. I'm going to read you a list of circumstances where people have told us they've allowed their children to drink alcohol. For each, please tell me if you find it acceptable all the time, acceptable sometimes, or never acceptable.

| | Acceptable | Sometimes | Not Acceptable | DK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. As long as they're almost old enough to drink legally | 67<br>11.2% | 276<br>46.0% | 253<br>42.2% | 4<br>0.7% |
| b. As long as they don't drive afterwards | 81<br>13.5% | 188<br>31.3% | 328<br>54.7% | 3<br>0.5% |
| c. As long as they just have one or two | 58<br>9.7% | 197<br>32.8% | 339<br>56.5% | 6<br>1.0% |
| d. As long as there is an adult present | 75<br>12.5% | 213<br>35.5% | 310<br>51.7% | 2<br>0.3% |
| e. As long as it's only beer or wine | 59<br>9.8% | 219<br>36.5% | 317<br>52.8% | 5<br>0.8% |
| f. As long as it's a special occasion, like a wedding or a holiday | 115<br>19.2% | 248<br>41.3% | 234<br>39.0% | 3<br>0.5% |
| g. As long as I know about it | 115<br>19.2% | 195<br>32.5% | 286<br>47.7% | 4<br>0.7% |
| h. As long as I'm there | 145<br>24.2% | 209<br>34.8% | 245<br>40.8% | 1<br>0.2% |

13. What do you think the legal drinking age should be?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| One | 2 | 0.3% |
| Fifteen | 1 | 0.2% |
| Sixteen | 2 | 0.3% |
| Eighteen | 169 | 28.2% |
| Nineteen | 82 | 13.7% |
| Twenty | 11 | 1.8% |
| Twenty-one | 314 | 52.3% |
| Alcohol should never be legal | 19 | 3.2% |

14. If you saw the group of high school kids from your neighborhood drinking at a house where you knew the parents were away, which of the following would come closest to what you would do?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nothing, I was young once | 19 | 3.2% |
| Nothing, it's none of my business | 49 | 8.2% |
| Call the police | 213 | 35.5% |
| Call their parents as soon as they got home | 144 | 24.0% |
| Go over there and break it up myself, but not tell their parents | 34 | 5.7% |
| Go over there and break it up myself, then tell the parents | 126 | 21.0% |
| DK | 15 | 2.5% |

15. Do any of your children smoke?

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 79 | No | 517 | DK | 4 |
| | 13.2% | | 86.2% | | 0.7% |

16. I'm going to read you a list of comments we've heard from parents around the state. Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each.

| | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Peer pressure is the biggest problem facing kids today | 452 | 115 | 13 | 19 | 1 |
| | 75.3% | 19.2% | 2.2% | 3.2% | 0.2% |
| b. People in stores and gas stations rarely ask kids for ID's when purchasing cigarettes | 281 | 170 | 37 | 46 | 66 |
| | 46.8% | 28.3% | 6.2% | 7.7% | 11.0% |
| c. Young girls are smoking more than in days gone by | 261 | 154 | 83 | 40 | 62 |
| | 43.5% | 25.7% | 13.8% | 6.7% | 10.3% |
| d. A lot of cigarette ads are targeted towards kids | 226 | 149 | 102 | 90 | 33 |
| | 37.7% | 24.8% | 17.0% | 15.0% | 5.5% |
| e. If my child is going to experiment with alcohol anyway, I'd rather have them at home where I can supervise. | 340 | 147 | 30 | 75 | 8 |
| | 56.7% | 24.5% | 5.0% | 12.5% | 1.3% |
| f. Kids drink because there is nothing for them to do in this town | 126 | 112 | 98 | 256 | 8 |
| | 21.0% | 18.7% | 16.3% | 42.7% | 1.3% |
| g. Kids drink because their friends do | 382 | 188 | 15 | 15 | -- |
| | 63.7% | 31.3% | 2.5% | 2.5% | |
| h. Kids drink because of low self-esteem | 173 | 247 | 78 | 95 | 7 |
| | 28.8% | 41.2% | 13.0% | 15.8% | 1.2% |
| i. Kids drink because they don't have a lot to look forward to in terms of jobs and a better standard of living than their parents | 68 | 123 | 153 | 249 | 7 |
| | 11.3% | 20.5% | 25.5% | 41.5% | 1.2% |
| j. The decline of the nuclear family has led to more underage drinking | 221 | 208 | 78 | 77 | 16 |
| | 36.8% | 34.7% | 13.0% | 12.8% | 2.7% |
| k. Kids drink because we tell them they can't | 132 | 263 | 106 | 96 | 3 |
| | 22.0% | 43.8% | 17.7% | 16.0% | 0.5% |
| l. There is a phase kids go through where they are going to experiment with alcohol no matter what parents or schools do | 267 | 220 | 55 | 52 | 6 |
| | 44.5% | 36.7% | 9.2% | 8.7% | 1.0% |

| | | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| m. | Beer and liquor companies should not be allowed to sponsor high school sporting events | 374 | 108 | 61 | 50 | 7 |
| | | 62.3% | 18.0% | 10.2% | 8.3% | 1.2% |
| n. | If a parent smokes their children are more likely to smoke | 318 | 157 | 52 | 67 | 6 |
| | | 53.0% | 26.2% | 8.7% | 11.2% | 1.0% |
| o. | If a parent drinks their children are more likely to drink | 291 | 192 | 55 | 54 | 8 |
| | | 48.5% | 32.0% | 9.2% | 9.0% | 1.3% |
| p. | Kids who don't drink feel like nerds | 68 | 169 | 170 | 174 | 19 |
| | | 11.3% | 28.2% | 28.3% | 29.0% | 3.2% |
| q. | I don't drink in front of my children | 161 | 109 | 167 | 159 | 4 |
| | | 26.8% | 18.2% | 27.8% | 26.5% | 0.7% |
| r. | Drinking in front of children is fine as long as it's done in moderation | 275 | 214 | 47 | 61 | 3 |
| | | 45.8% | 35.7% | 7.8% | 10.2% | 0.5% |
| s. | There is strong support from our community for kids to remain drug and alcohol free | 307 | 195 | 47 | 44 | 7 |
| | | 51.2% | 32.5% | 7.8% | 7.3% | 1.2% |
| t. | The average Wisconsin adult is a good role model for responsible alcohol consumption | 87 | 216 | 150 | 119 | 28 |
| | | 14.5% | 36.0% | 25.0% | 19.8% | 4.7% |

17. Who should have the **primary responsibility** for preventing children from using drugs and alcohol? Should it be parents, schools, religious organizations, law enforcement, or someone else?

| | |
|---|---|
| Parents | 555<br>92.5% |
| Schools | 9<br>1.5% |
| Religious Organizations | 4<br>0.7% |
| Law Enforcement | 10<br>1.7% |
| Someone Else | 22<br>3.7% |

## SCHOOLS

18. How good a job do you think the public schools in your area are doing at **curbing underage drinking**? Do you think they are doing an excellent job, a good job, a fair job, or a poor job?

| | |
|---|---|
| Excellent | 70<br>11.7% |
| Good | 224<br>37.3% |
| Fair | 213<br>35.5% |
| Poor | 68<br>11.3% |
| DK | 25<br>4.2% |

19. How good of a job do you think the public schools in your community are doing at **keeping children drug free**? Do you think they are doing an excellent, good, fair, or a poor job?

| | |
|---|---|
| Excellent | 80<br>13.3% |
| Good | 247<br>41.2% |
| Fair | 193<br>32.2% |
| Poor | 55<br>9.2% |
| DK | 25<br>4.2% |

20. At what grade level **do** the public schools in your area start to incorporate drug and alcohol education in to the curriculum?

| | |
|---|---|
| Kindergarten | 112<br>18.7% |
| First | 91<br>15.2% |
| Second | 39<br>6.5% |
| Third | 61<br>10.2% |
| Fourth | 52<br>8.7% |
| Fifth | 50<br>8.3% |
| Sixth | 40<br>6.7% |
| Seventh | 19<br>3.2% |
| Eighth | 11<br>1.8% |
| Ninth | 8<br>1.3% |
| Tenth | 4<br>0.7% |
| Eleventh | 2<br>0.3% |
| Never | 2<br>0.3% |
| Don't Know | 109<br>18.2% |

21. At what grade level **should** public schools start drug and alcohol education?

| | |
|---|---|
| Kindergarten | 192<br>32.0% |
| First | 107<br>17.8% |
| Second | 45<br>7.5% |
| Third | 73<br>12.2% |
| Fourth | 58<br>9.7% |
| Fifth | 47<br>7.8% |
| Sixth | 41<br>6.8% |
| Seventh | 13<br>2.2% |
| Eighth | 5<br>0.8% |
| Ninth | 3<br>0.5% |
| Tenth | 1<br>0.2% |
| Never | 1<br>0.2% |
| Don't Know | 14<br>2.3% |

22A. Now thinking only about alcohol programs, is the goal of the public schools in your community to get students to drink responsibly or to abstain completely?

| | |
|---|---|
| Drink responsibly | 198 |
| | 33.0% |
| Abstain completely | 316 |
| | 52.7% |
| DK | 86 |
| | 14.3% |

22B. Again thinking only about alcohol programs, is the goal of the public schools in your community to get students to drink responsibly or to abstain completely as appropriate behavior **until age 21?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Drink responsibly | 114 |
| | 23.0% |
| Abstain completely | 303 |
| | 61.1% |
| DK | 79 |
| | 15.9% |
| (TOTAL | 496) |

23. Which one would you prefer the public schools in your area to teach as appropriate behavior until age 21?

| | |
|---|---|
| Drink responsibly | 193 |
| | 32.2% |
| Abstain completely | 387 |
| | 64.5% |
| DK | 20 |
| | 3.3% |

24. Why?

_____

_____

25. I'm going to read you a list of several comments we've heard from parents around the state. Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each.

| | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree | DK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Some of the current school programs and discussion groups make my kids feel like they have to come up with something wrong with our family. . . . . | 73 | 131 | 129 | 189 | 78 |
| | 12.2% | 21.8% | 21.5% | 31.5% | 13.0% |
| b. When the best athletes get caught drinking or at parties you still see them starting in the next game. . . . . | 131 | 128 | 72 | 180 | 89 |
| | 21.8% | 21.3% | 12.0% | 30.0% | 14.8% |
| c. There is strong support from our schools for kids to remain drug and alcohol free . . . . . | 336 | 198 | 36 | 15 | 15 |
| | 56.0% | 33.0% | 6.0% | 2.5% | 2.5% |

26. What do you think is the best way to curb underage drinking and drug use?
**(IF THE RESPONDENT SAYS EDUCATION--PROBE FOR WHAT THE MESSAGE OF THIS EDUCATION SHOULD BE)**

_____

27a. A few parents have suggested incorporating some type of community volunteer work into the curriculum that would be necessary for graduation. This might include things like doing yard work for the elderly, or cleaning up litter in a local park. Some think this is a great idea because it will keep kids busy and helps improve their self-esteem. Others think kids today just wouldn't do it. Do you think a volunteer program of this type would work?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes . . . . . | 418 |
| | 69.7% |
| No . . . . . | 155 |
| | 25.8% |
| DK . . . . . | 27 |
| | 4.5% |

27b. Do you think a program like this would have an effect on underage drinking?

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes . . . . . | 271 | No . . . . . | 287 | DK . . . . . | 42 |
| | 45.2% | | 47.8% | | 7.0% |

27c. **IF YES, ASK:** What would this effect be? How would it help? Why would it help?

_____

_____

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

..and just for statistical purposes, I have a few final questions.

D1. Please stop me when I reach the category which would best describe your age.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 18-24 | 18 | 3.0% |
| 25-34 | 174 | 29.0% |
| 35-44 | 255 | 42.5% |
| 45-54 | 122 | 20.3% |
| 55-59 | 14 | 2.3% |
| 60-64 | 13 | 2.2% |
| OVER 64 | 3 | 0.5% |
| DK/Refused | 1 | 0.2% |

D2. Are you married, single, separated, widowed, or divorced?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Married | 508 | 84.7% |
| Single | 20 | 3.3% |
| Separated, Divorced | 63 | 10.5% |
| Widowed | 8 | 1.3% |
| Refused | 1 | 0.2% |

D3. What is the last year of school that you completed?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8th grade or lower | 4 | 0.7% |
| Some high school (9th to 11th grade) | 28 | 4.7% |
| High school graduate | 219 | 36.5% |
| Technical school or some college | 190 | 31.7% |
| College degree | 105 | 17.5% |
| Postgraduate work | 53 | 8.8% |
| DK/refused | 1 | 0.2% |

D4. In which county do/will/did your children go to school?

1. Adams
2. Ashland
3. Barron
4. Bayfield
5. Brown
6. Buffalo
7. Burnett
8. Calumet
9. Chippewa
10. Clark
11. Columbia
12. Crawford
13. Dane
14. Dodge
15. Door
16. Douglas
17. Dunn
18. Eau Claire
19. Florence
20. Fond du Lac
21. Forest
22. Grant
23. Green
24. Green Lake
25. Iowa
26. Iron
27. Jackson
28. Jefferson
29. Juneau
30. Kenosha
31. Kewaunee
32. La Crosse
33. Lafayette
34. Langlade
35. Lincoln
36. Manitowoc
37. Marathon
38. Marinette
39. Marquette
40. Menominee
41. Milwaukee
42. Monroe
43. Oconto
44. Oneida
45. Outagamie
46. Ozaukee
47. Pepin
48. Pierce
49. Polk
50. Portage
51. Price
52. Racine
53. Richland
54. Rock
55. Rusk
56. St Croix
57. Sauk
58. Sawyer
59. Shawano
60. Sheboygan
61. Taylor
62. Trempeleau
63. Vernon
64. Vilas
65. Walworth
66. Washburn
67. Washington
68. Waukesha
69. Waupaca
70. Waushara
71. Winnebago
72. Wood

D5. Would you describe the town you live in as having . . .

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 2,500 people | 142 | 23.7% |
| 2,500-9,999 | 132 | 22.0% |
| 10,000-49,999 | 149 | 24.8% |
| 50,000-250,000 | 96 | 16.0% |
| Over 250,000 people | 51 | 8.5% |
| Refused/DK | 30 | 5.0% |

D6. What ages are your children?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

D7. For statistical purposes only, we need to know your approximate household income before taxes for 1991. I am going to read you a list of general categories. Please tell me which category best describes your household income for last year.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Under $25,000 | 105 | 17.5 |
| $25,000 to $50,000 | 299 | 49.8% |
| $50,000 to $75,000 | 104 | 17.3% |
| Over $75,000 | 54 | 9.0% |
| DK/Refused | 38 | 6.3% |

D8. CODE: Male . . . . . 286 47.7% Female . . . . . 314 52.3%

Verify phone number called (_____)_____ First name of respondent _____

CG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MARCH 1993

# A Tradition of Tolerance: What Wisconsin Parents Think About Teen Alcohol Use

A survey by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Herbert J. Grover, State Superintendent

## *INTRODUCTION*

*Last year almost 95% of Wisconsin high school seniors were drinking alcohol. What do Wisconsin parents think about that? Most are not surprised. In fact, nearly half of them would roll the drinking age back to eighteen or nineteen.*

*Wisconsin parents are comfortable with alcohol. They are familiar with its effects and believe* ***they*** *use it responsibly. They view alcohol as part of their culture, and regard it as an expected and tolerable part of coming of age in a state where even the baseball team is named after a part of the alcohol industry. Most show sympathy for the embarrassment associated with alcoholism, but exhibit condemnation for repeat drunk drivers and drug addicts.*

*The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction commissioned Chamberlain Research Consultants, an opinion research firm in Madison, to conduct this first-ever study of parental tolerance among parents of Wisconsin public school children. Through the use of focus groups and survey research, this benchmark data revealed that Wisconsin's youth are being sent mixed messages about their alcohol consumption. Although the parents who participated in the survey described underage drinking as a serious problem in their communities (even more so than unemployment, crime, and illegal drug use), the level of fear and anger which motivates change was missing.*

*Wisconsin parents seem to be torn between the safety of their children and the illegality of alcohol consumption before the age of 21. When asked point blank, the majority of parents will parrot back the institutionally correct response: public schools should advocate abstention from alcohol until 21. However, when further probed, most of these parents were resigned to the fact that there is a phase kids go through when they are going to experiment with alcohol no matter what parents and schools do, and thus would rather have their children doing so safely (at home with supervision, not driving afterwards, and not overdoing.) The consequences of driving after drinking have finally gotten through to this generation of parents who fondly remember drinking a six pack out behind the airport in the back seat of Dad's Chevy. They've read about one too many alcohol related traffic fatalities and don't want the next one to be their teenager.*

*This report focuses on the contradictory messages that became evident during the survey and focus group research completed earlier this year. When schools and parents fail to provide a united front, our kids pay the price.*

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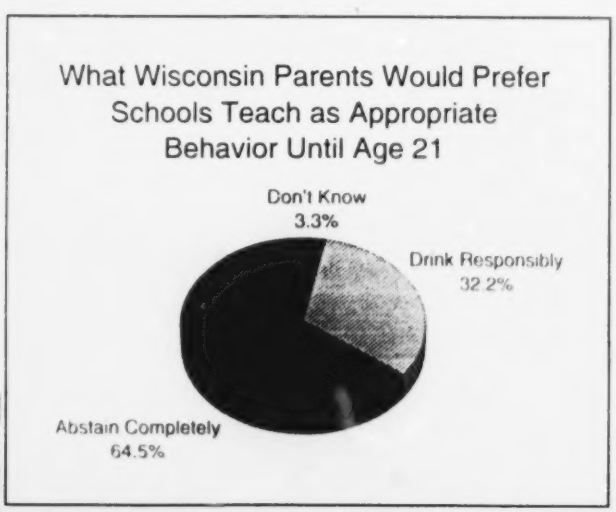
## IS UNDERAGE DRINKING A PROBLEM OR JUST ANOTHER PART OF GROWING UP?

Wisconsin parents of public school children are concerned about underage drinking. The majority describe it as a very serious problem and favor public school programs which teach no alcohol use until age 21...yet many of these same parents undermine the programs by condoning the use of alcohol under several circumstances.


What Wisconsin Parents Would Prefer Schools Teach as Appropriate Behavior Until Age 21
Don't Know 3.3%
Drink Responsibly 32.2%
Abstain Completely 64.5%

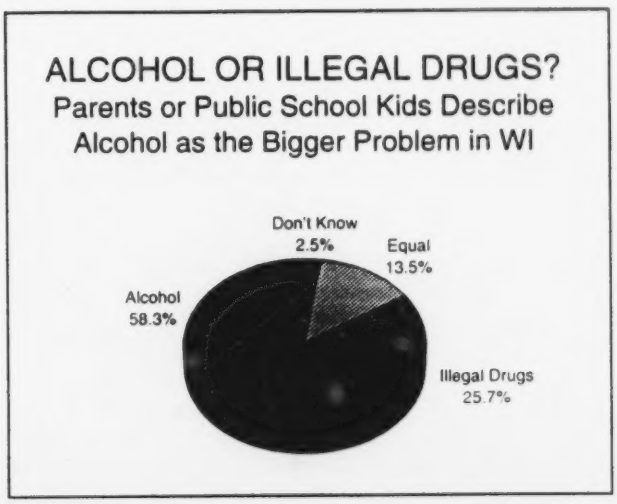
- 80% rated underage drinking as a very or somewhat serious problem in their community, as compared to illegal drug use (70%), unemployment (67%), crime (55%), and gangs (36%).
- 65% said they preferred schools teach abstinence from alcohol as appropriate behavior until age 21.

*-but-*

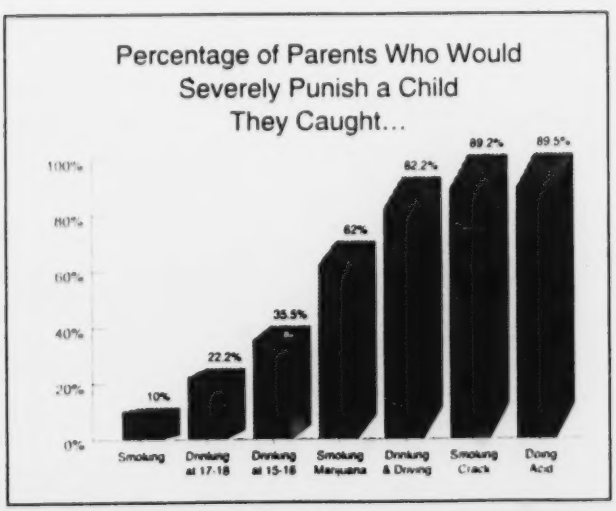
- Of the parents who said they would prefer schools teach no use, several described circumstances under which they would occasionally permit their child to drink:
  - 52% if they (the parent) were present
  - 52% on special occasions or holidays
  - 50% if the child was almost of age
  - 43% if they (the parent) knew about it
  - 41% if there was an adult present
  - 39% if it was just beer or wine
  - 38% if the child did not drive after
  - 35% if the child just had one or two

## IS A HANGOVER PUNISHMENT ENOUGH?

Wisconsin parents are far more tolerant of their children participating in the rite of playful drink, than of the evils they associate with drug use. Throughout the focus group discussions the level of emotion escalated considerably as the discussion moved from alcohol to illicit drugs. They referred to drugs as totally taboo, but were protective of alcohol as a part of Wisconsin's culture. These connotations were confirmed by the survey...yet, twice as many parents described alcohol use as a bigger problem than illegal drug use in Wisconsin.




Focus group participants explained that the wrath of a morning hangover was probably harsh enough punishment for a teen's whimsical experimentation with alcohol. This is where messages start to become inconsistent. School programs treat alcohol and drug use as similar offenses. Parents do not. Parents are much less likely to punish a child severely for drinking than using drugs, despite their self-reported concern for the problem. If underage drinking is such a serious problem, shouldn't it warrant a serious punishment?




## DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE!

Driving after drinking is almost as intolerable as drug use. The hard hitting effect of the public message, don't drink and drive, contradicts school programs. This campaign promotes responsible use as not driving afterward—not moderation and certainly not abstention.

- 45% said it was acceptable, at least sometimes, for children to drink as long as they did not drive afterwards.
- 67% agreed that instead of drinking less, people are drinking at home more.

## KIDS DRINK BECAUSE...

Parents listed peer pressure as the number one problem facing kids today, and the number one reason why kids drink.

- 40% either strongly or somewhat agreed that kids who don't drink feel like nerds.

## HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING

Parents who participated in the survey were presented with this familiar scenario:
A group of teenagers from your neighborhood are drinking at a house where you know the parents are away.

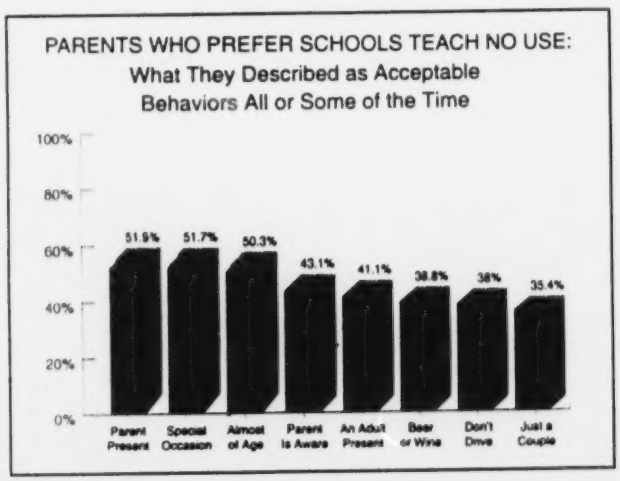
- Less than ten percent of the parents said they would do nothing at all.
- 36% said they would call the police.
- 45% said they would tell the parents.

## TEACH THEM ABSTINENCE, SO THAT THEY'LL LEARN MODERATION.

Wisconsin parents of public school children are supportive of AODA programs. They do not believe alcohol should be served at school sponsored events, and would prefer alternative sponsors be found for high school sporting events; however, these parents are not as enthusiastic about eliminating alcohol from many of the Wisconsin pastimes in which they participate, even though several of these activities have large numbers of children present. Focus group participants explained that the alcohol served at many of these activities helps to raise needed funds. They further defended their traditions by explaining that you can not hide alcohol from children, and therefore role modeling moderation is an effective way to teach positive lifetime habits.

Focus group participants were quick to fault TV for glamorizing alcohol by associating it with "fun activities," but the majority of those surveyed did not mind alcohol's real life association with several of these "fun activities."

Despite their declaration of underage drinking as a problem, it was evident that few were willing to hear that it might be necessary to modify their own behavior as an effort to rectify the problem.




- 32% said that drug and alcohol education should be incorporated into the curriculum at the kindergarten level, and 87% said some time before the fifth grade.

- 80% agreed that beer and liquor companies should not be allowed to sponsor high school sporting events.

*-yet-*

- 62% said that it was acceptable, all or some or the time, to take a child into a bar to eat or while the parents have a drink or two.

## THE DRINKING AGE

Even many of the parents who support the 21 year old drinking age confessed that they would let their children sample alcohol before that age.

- 55% believe the drinking age should remain 21 or be raised even higher.

*-but-*

- 72% said they would/did allow their child to have their first taste of alcohol before the age of 21.

## ALCOHOL: THE OTHER GUY'S PROBLEM

It became evident during the focus groups that alcohol was losing its unconditional social acceptance.

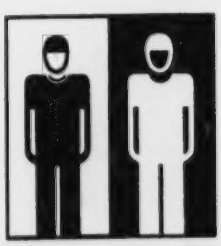
Most would describe their own alcohol consumption as responsible or moderate, where they might describe the consumption in other areas of the state as excessive. Inner cities were frequently used as this type of scapegoat.

The majority understood that if parents drink, their children are more likely to drink...yet this would not deter most from drinking in front of their children. Again parents justified their own behavior by advocating moderate consumption in front of children.

Most of these parents claimed to keep alcohol around their house only for special occasions, if at all...yet these same parents would agree that Wisconsinites drink more than inhabitants of other states.

It was clear that drunkenness has lost all social acceptance. Several agreed that when children are present they try to make an example of inappropriate drunken behavior. They try to label it as embarrassing, and to show kids that it's not funny when Uncle Bernie falls off his bar stool after his sixteenth screwdriver.

The parents surveyed said parents, not schools, should take primary responsibility for keeping children drug and alcohol free, but only about half would call Wisconsin adults good role models for responsible alcohol consumption. Again, this insinuates that the underage drinking problem belongs to someone else.

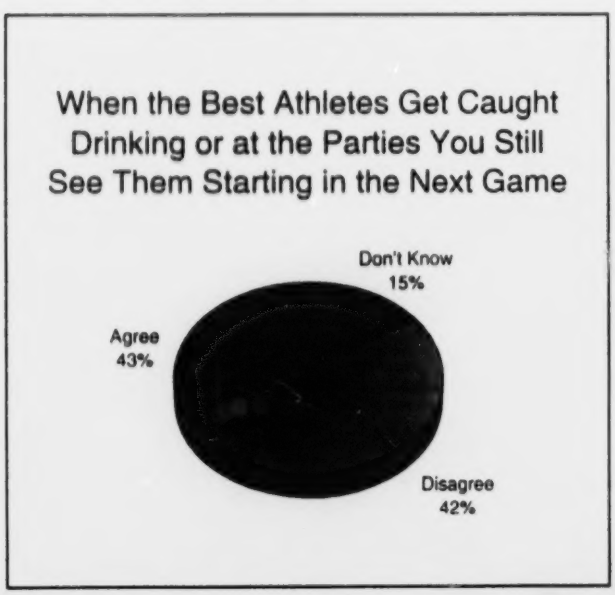


## EVALUATION OF AVAILABLE SUPPORT

For the most part, Wisconsin parents think their schools and communities are doing a good job at encouraging kids to remain drug and alcohol free. In spite of the strong encouragement that they believe is available, parents still view underage drinking as a serious problem.

Some parents were concerned that policies were not enforced when good athletes were involved, and others said that certain programs and discussion groups made their kids feel like they had to come up with something wrong with their family.

- 84% agreed that there is strong support from their communities for kids to remain drug and alcohol free.
- 89% agreed that there is strong support from schools for kids to remain drug and alcohol free.
- 49% said that schools were doing an above average job at curbing underage drinking.
- 34% agreed that some of the current school programs and discussion groups make their kids feel like they have to come up with something wrong with their family.


When the Best Athletes Get Caught Drinking or at the Parties You Still See Them Starting in the Next Game
Don't Know 15%
Agree 43%
Disagree 42%

## SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

When asked what they thought would be the best way to curb underage drinking several parents suggested that educating kids about the consequences and ramifications of alcohol use would be the most effective deterrent. Better parental supervision, positive role modeling, keeping kids busy, and stronger laws were also popular responses.

Parents encouraged incorporating alcohol and drug education into the school curriculum very early.

- 32% said that alcohol and drug education should be incorporated into the curriculum at the kindergarten level.

*-and-*

- 87% said sometime before junior high.

## AWARENESS

Parents are becoming more conscious of the ramifications of their own alcohol consumption. Attitudes toward alcohol appear to be in the early stages of change shadowing society's new collective health consciousness. Wisconsin parents admit that alcohol is a crutch and a money maker, and while they are reluctant to eliminate alcohol from their lives entirely, they are not upset about its disappearance from the business setting.

- 66% said they strongly or somewhat agreed that work places should have some type of regular alcohol screening.
- 73% described alcohol abuse as a very or somewhat serious problem in their community.
- 82% agreed that drinking in front of children is fine, as long as it's done in moderation.
- 81% agreed that if a parent drinks their children are more likely to drink.
- 45% do not believe that the average Wisconsin adult is a good role model for responsible alcohol consumption.
- 60% agreed that people in Wisconsin are so anti-drug that they overlook drinking as a problem.

*The Survey was conducted with 600 parents of public school children during December 1992/January 1993.*
*Margin of error=±4.0%*

***The following are comments made by parents of Wisconsin public school children during the course of the research project.***

"Drinking is like a group thing. If you want to be in a certain group then you have to drink whether you like it or not."

"I think role models are more important than peer pressure. I see how my parents raised me and that's how I am."

"Long term (habits) go back to the role model."

"As much as we don't want to admit it, I think we expect too much from the school. Nobody's real eager to open their pockets and pay higher taxes, but I think that's where the beginning of the solution is. I think that kids need more positive opportunities."

"Educate them as young as possible."

"We've (Wisconsin) got all the breweries."

"... even I have that feeling sometimes—'Oh, it'll never happen to me.' I think kids have that even more so."

"In my opinion you can't just put it off on the school. I think that the parents and the schools and the teachers and everybody involved needs to sit down and work together."

"Kids normally do the opposite of what their parents tell them."

"You see people keeping their kids at these festivals till all hours of the night while they're in the beer tent."

"I wouldn't say outright don't do it...I always let my kids try."

"There are bars and there are bars. It used to be that taverns were the social place...In smaller towns, bars are the social center and you can't keep the kids out."

"Most of us have drunk or smoked, but we probably haven't had a lot of dealing with drugs and don't know what to tell our kids."

"We have blinders on about drinking and we don't want to make the trade offs to get rid of it."

"Kids don't suddenly become responsible at age 21."

"Everything costs $10 or $15...There's no place for them to go that doesn't cost anything."

"Everyone knew he was an alcoholic, but the family was more embarrassed to say he was in treatment."

"The programs would work if parents would help—the schools can't do everything."

"Drugs bother me more than alcohol because they're illegal."

"Don't get me wrong, when I was young I could party with the best of them."

"If you're going there [to a bar] to get drunk, leave the kids at home, but if you're going there for a burger and a beer, that's okay."

"It's almost worth providing her with wheels for, because the one thing I know is that she doesn't drink and drive."

"My daughter is 19 and there's beer in the refrigerator, so if she wants it, she's got it. She just can't drink and drive."

"People need a vice...They drink under stress."

"More kids know who Joe Camel is than Mickey Mouse."

**For a copy of the full report contact:**

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